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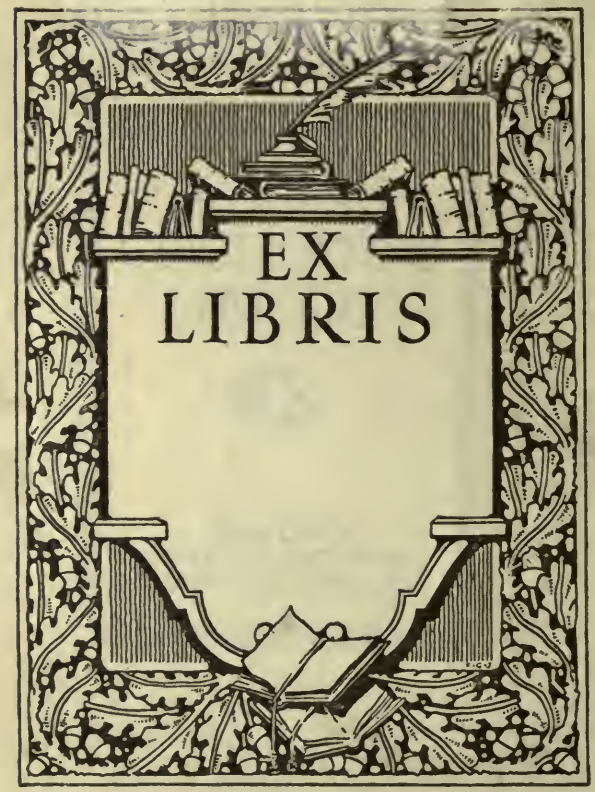

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THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

The Mountains of the Moon

By

J. D. Beresford

Author of "The House in Demetrius Road"

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Gratefully Dedicated
to my Friend,
CAPT. A. K. HARVEY JAMES
(ARTHUR SCOTT CRAVEN),
who gave me this story

860229

"Incidentally this feat of exploration has broken a great tradition. The romance remains; but it is different in kind. . . . All the old legends of inaccessibility are gone. Those distant hills have been traversed and revealed, their secrets published and shown to differ in no way from the secrets of all other earthly mountains. . . . Coldness and sterility abide on those heights, and the traveller in the midst of them discovers those qualities rather than any impression of beauty. Those gaunt masses lack all the colour and vigour of life; the tradition of splendour is proved to be a fraud. . . . Nevertheless we have not lost our romance, it persists more vital and glorious in the story of human achievement. Mankind is passing out of its childhood, and the fairy tales of the nursery must give way to the more virile romances of man's own endeavour, an endeavour that at the last is expressed in his first and final search for knowledge. . . ."

The Mountains of the Moon.
By Arthur S. Grey.

THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

CHAPTER I

ARTHUR GREY

1

Shepston found his sister in the room that was still known as "The Nursery," although it had been converted to other uses for at least fifteen years. He entered quietly, expecting to find her asleep, for the other members of the household, and indeed most of the few people in London who were of any account, had gone to Goodwood. Lady Downham had evaded that function. The knowledge that the King would be present did not tempt her, and she owed no duty to Society. If Society wanted her they must seek her out; after twenty-five years, Society, as such, had ceased to interest Lady Downham.

She was not asleep when her brother came

in. He was faintly surprised to find her reading with every appearance of stolid pertinacity, and he stood by the heavy tapestry hanging that shielded the arch through which he had come and watched her for a moment before he made his presence known by quietly rattling the rings of the curtain.

Lady Downham looked up and yawned.

"Come in, Reggie," she said. "I wasn't asleep."

"No. I've been watching you," he replied. He walked across to her chair by the farther window and looked down at her. "You appeared to be deep in study," he said.

Lady Downham frowned.

"What's the book?" asked her brother.

She turned back to the title page, as if she could not trust her memory to repeat the required information, and announced, "It's by a person named Grey—Arthur S. Grey; it's called 'The Mountains of the Moon: An Essay in Sociology.'"

"I know it," replied Shepston.

"Really, Reggie, you're very wonderful!" his sister exclaimed on a note of admiration. "I hardly ever see you reading, and I don't know when you get time for it, but you seem

to read every book that comes out." She took off her pince-nez and looked up at him hopefully. "I wish you would post me," she said.

"What's the object?" he asked.

"I'm very interested in Socialism," she said, with a puzzled frown. "I think one ought to understand these things."

Shepston smiled at the spaces of the room. "I know," he said. "But what's the present object?"

"The man's coming to tea this afternoon."

"Canadian, isn't he?"

"Yes. I don't know that I should have asked him, though I had heard of his book before, but Adelaide Dalesworth wrote and wanted me to have him. They knew him in Canada, when her husband was Governor-General, and she says he's just come to town to meet a few particular people, and that he's very nice and she's sure I shall like him. So I thought he might be able to explain Socialism to me, and that I ought to read his book before he comes."

"Oh, quite," Shepston said. He had his hands in his coat pockets, and was still smiling perfunctorily through his single eyeglass at nothing in particular. He was a little man,

clean-shaven, with a round face and rather large brown eyes. He might have been forty or fifty; his hair was still black, but he was getting very bald over the temples.

"And you could tell me all I want to know in ten minutes," continued his sister.

"What a heavenly condition!" he remarked. "If I could find someone to tell me a tenth of all I want to know in ten years, I'd go off with him to an island somewhere and sit at his feet."

"Don't be silly, dear," pleaded Lady Downham. "The man may be here directly. I said five o'clock."

"Let *him* tell you what he means, then, my dear Caroline," suggested Shepston.

"But I must pretend that I've read his book."

Shepston sighed, but his habitual formal smile still lingered about the set lines of his mouth.

"Grey's an idealist," he said. "He believes that there are quite a number of honest people in the world—he's made a mistake in coming here to look for 'em—and he has an enormous faith in the value of endeavour—work, you know. He thinks that what's mainly the matter with us all is the aristocratic idea, especially

what he has seen of it in the form of millionaire-dom——"

"But they're not an aristocracy," interrupted Lady Downham.

"From his point of view they are," continued Shepston. "He's up against the mysteries of wealth and position, the ring-fence the man with money can put round himself; and Grey's panacea is the necessity for every man to earn his own living. This book is a sort of counterblast to that thing by another American who wants to make out that the world would be a very good place if the millionaires would take a bit more interest in it. All blether, according to Grey."

Lady Downham looked down at the book in her lap with a puzzled frown and turned over a few pages as if she hoped to find some wonderful sentence to illuminate the whole purpose of the essay.

"But what does he mean by 'The Mountains of the Moon,' Reggie?" she asked.

"Allegory," he replied briefly. "Mysterious place, you know, that's really as barren as a moraine. Once you've been there and kicked the rocks, you find 'em just like other rocks. Now he's coming to kick us to see if

we're any different from the millionaires he's kicked in Canada and the States."

"Adelaide said he was quite a nice man," commented Lady Downham.

"Oh, quite," Shepston remarked ambiguously.

"I think you might come and help me to entertain him," his sister suggested.

"My dear Caroline, I shall be delighted," Shepston said. "It will relieve my mind from the anxiety I feel at having let Downham go off to Goodwood with no one to look after him but Dick and Tempe. Of course, there'll be a dreadful scene before the afternoon's out."

"It's wonderful how you manage us all," sighed Lady Downham.

"If only it didn't make my hair come out," said her brother, with his stereotyped smile. He put his hand up and softly explored his temples. "I wonder if a rest cure would do me good?" he remarked.

"Not before we've got over the Stratton visit," implored his sister. "Dick and Tempe do loathe it so. Wouldn't it be possible just for once, this August, to persuade Richard to let us go alone—we three, you know? Dick and Tempe both want to go to Mary's——"

Shepston interrupted her with a decided negative. "No, I couldn't," he said. "I can do much with Downham by strategy, but not that. A fortnight at least you must have with your family at Stratton, Caroline—in August, at Christmas, and at Easter. Don't ask me to help you to evade that domesticity. That is the gospel according to Downham, the long tradition that stretches back into some dim past beginning with the first Baron Stratton. It is as settled and past dispute as it is also inevitable that three times in each year you should say, 'Reggie, isn't it possible just this once for you to persuade Richard, etcetera.'"

"We always quarrel," put in Lady Downham regretfully.

"I have thought that that was the essential use of the visit," commented Shepston. "We all appreciate separation so much more vividly when the visit is over."

They were still discussing the annoyances of Lord Downham's decree when the butler entered.

Lady Downham did not look up when he announced, "Mr. Grey, my lady," but Shepston held out his hand for the card that lay on the butler's salver. The salver was heavy,

crested, impressive; the card was thin, cheaply printed from type, with the name, simply "Arthur S. Grey," and an address neatly written in ink, "Boyle's Hotel, Southampton Row, W.C."

2

Grey rose and bowed somewhat formally when Lady Downham came into the small drawing-room. He was a strongly built man, with a frank, clever face; his eyes were a keen, rather pale blue, and he had short, thick, black lashes that had the effect of underlining and heightening the colour of the iris. He wore a rough blue serge, decently cut, but with nothing of that trim correctness that marked the clothes of Shepston. Grey was clad, Shepston was dressed.

"So good of you to come," began Lady Downham at once. "I've read your book"—she had it in her hand and glanced at the title before she added, "'The Mountains of the Moon,' and I want you to explain to me just what you mean by it all; I'm so interested in Socialism. I'm sure there's a lot in it." She had replied to Grey's bow with a little nod, and

she talked herself into a chair without introducing her brother, who had followed her into the room.

Shepston came forward and offered his hand. "We've taken the opportunity of getting you alone," he said, "while London's at Goodwood, and we're going to cross-examine you as the prophet of a new sociology."

"I'll be very glad," returned Grey simply, as he sat down. "I don't expect you to take my gospel seriously; it isn't natural that you should, but——"

"I don't think that's fair to us," interrupted Lady Downham. "I assure you that I'm most interested. I've been reading all kinds of books about Socialism lately, by—by—I've no memory for names, I'm afraid——"

"The usual books, of course," explained Shepston; "Marx, Hyndman, Bebel——"

Grey looked up with a flicker of eagerness. "You were good enough to call me the prophet of a *new* sociology," he said, "but if you've read all the pioneers I don't think I'll have much to say."

"Ah! but it's that particular touch of practical idealism you have added that makes your work interesting to us," Shepston replied.

He would have continued, but Lady Downham came in by saying:

"The point that always perplexes me is this: I always feel that if all the wealth was shared out, it would be all the same again in a few years' time. No one has ever explained to me how you can get over that." She frowned slightly, put up her pince-nez, and looked with a placid interest at her visitor.

Grey did not permit himself to smile at the foolishness of her remark, but he sighed almost inaudibly and leaned back in his chair. Shepston was staring at the opposite wall with that perfectly non-committal expression of his that induced quite a large number of men and women to believe that he was a rather stupid person.

"I believe, Lady Downham," Grey said, "that the Utopists at the beginning of the last century — Robert Owen and some of his followers—must have given that theory of distribution a start in life. If they did, I hope they turn in their graves whenever it's mentioned, which would mean that they are having a very uneasy time. Anyway, no Socialist today, unless it's one of those orators in Hyde Park, has ever to my knowledge suggested that we ought to have a general share out."

Lady Downham smiled complacently. "Really!" she said. "Now that's just one of the things I want you to explain to me; I mean what it is they *do* suggest."

Grey found himself in the position of a master chess-player asked to explain the theory of a gambit to a woman who had not the most elementary knowledge of the moves of the pieces.

Shepston stood on the hearthrug apparently quite unembarrassed.

"I think I hear Garton coming with tea," he remarked. "Do you make such a function of tea in Canada, Grey?"

"We drink it fairly often," Grey said, as Garton, the butler, entered with his acolytes.

But if Grey hoped for a diversion while the function was in process, he was disappointed. His hostess continued her examination with an utter disregard of the three new listeners.

"Now we've got you alone like this," she said, "you must tell us precisely what your own scheme is."

"I have tried to put it in my book as plainly as I could, Lady Downham," he said. "You'll understand that it's hardly an attitude to be expressed in a simple formula; and as you'll have

inferred, I want rather to teach a general attitude than to propagate any cut-and-dried scheme of nationalisation."

He paused, but as Lady Downham only looked intelligent and said "Oh!" thoughtfully, he went on:

"That's not to say that I'm not interested in the economic theory—I began with that—but I would like to accelerate legislation, such as you've begun over here, by trying to make people think differently about the principle."

As he talked he glanced once or twice at the expressionless masks of Garton and the two footmen; he felt like a man making an oration to an audience that spoke no single word of the language in which he addressed them. Only Shepston puzzled him. Grey had a sense that the little plump man with the set smile and the eyeglass could understand if he would.

Lady Downham continued to make inept comments and to contradict herself flatly when the inappropriateness of her criticism was politely explained to her. She had an air of condescending to her visitor; but whereas another woman might have been embarrassed by the realisation of her childish ineptitudes, and have made some excuse or frank admission

that she could not understand, Lady Downham preserved her manner of quiet complacence. She seemed to be beyond the reach of any possible teaching or correction. Between her and Grey was an immense barrier; she was as serenely and unostentatiously superior to his opinion as a smiling god. He felt that it was impossible he could ever put her in the wrong; he believed that if he were suddenly to shout some awful insult, she would look at him with an interested surprise, and in so doing express openly what was surely implied in her whole attitude—namely, that she was the daughter of an Irish earl and the wife of the premier marquis of England, and that her *vis-à-vis* was Mr. Grey, recently from Canada, and at present staying at a third-class hotel in Southampton Row. He did not resent the distinction; he was not annoyed by it. He had been prepared, and he was supported by a knowledge of his own power—a power that he had no intention to use.

The servants had left the room, and Grey was wondering whether he might not decently take his leave, when a motor horn sounded imperatively in the square outside.

Shepston walked over to the window.

"I expected it," he said, turning to his sister. "Dick and Tempe alone in the car. Heaven only knows what they've done with Downham."

"They may have dropped him somewhere," she suggested with faint anxiety.

Shepston shrugged his shoulders and moved towards the door, but before he reached it his niece, followed by her brother, came into the room.

3

GREY rose to his feet, and Lady Tempe gave him one quick, inquiring glance before she turned to her mother.

"Pater's coming home with the Yaxleys," she said. "At least, we expect he is."

"We left him talkin' to 'em," put in Lord Stratton.

"The duke was there, you know, dear," continued Tempe quickly, "and the pater was towing us after him to go and talk just before the last race. And the duke is such an infernal old bore, isn't he? and Dickie and I thought he and the pater might go on for weeks, so we just slipped away. We couldn't find Jakes; he

was probably putting his shirt on the last race; but Dickie found the car and drove me home. We got in front of the crowd and made record time."

"But if——" began Lady Downham.

Shepston interposed. "This settles it, my children," he said. "You've only yourselves to thank. Stratton Hall for you from the fifteenth to the thirty-first of next month." He waved aside their indignant protests with a patronising gesture of his beautifully kept hands. "You shouldn't make such silly asses of yourselves," he went on calmly. "Downham is probably in a stuffy train at this moment in the company of bookies and race-sharps——"

"We left him with the Yaxleys all right," put in Lord Stratton.

"Don't be a fool, Dickie," replied his uncle suavely. "Of course, he would go to look for you after the last race, and quite inevitably he would be left wandering vaguely about till he met Jakes, who would tell him that the car had gone; and by that time——" He made another gesture to express the unspeakable results that would follow when his brother-in-law found himself alone in an

unfamiliar world that had no respect for his dignities.

"Surely he would be able to get a carriage to himself?" said Tempe.

"My *dear* Tempe!" was all the argument that Shepston found necessary; and dismissed the topic by turning to Grey. "Another problem you should study," Shepston said, "is the amazing independence of the young generation. No doubt you've noticed the same thing in Canada?"

Grey smiled. He had been an interested spectator of the scene that had passed, and had drawn his own deductions. "Why, yes," he said, "or, at least, another aspect of the same attitude."

Tempe, who had been frowning discontentedly, looked up when her uncle mentioned Canada, and now regarded Grey for the first time with serious attention.

"Oh! I wonder if you could tell me what a spiral staircase is?" she said with great earnestness.

Grey put his hands in his coat pockets. "Well, it's a staircase that goes up in a spiral—like a corkscrew, you know," he told her.

She looked at him keenly, but he appeared to be perfectly stolid and serious.

"Like a corkscrew?" she repeated, as if she were utterly perplexed.

"Exactly," repeated Grey. He met her stare with a look of innocent sincerity. Lord Stratton was talking to his mother on the other side of the room, but Shepston was watching his niece's little comedy with his usual expression of perfunctory amusement.

Lady Tempe made a vague movement with the forefinger of her right hand as if she were sketching on an imaginary easel. "Like that?" she asked.

"Not a bit," returned Grey; and he leaned forward as if he were quite absorbed in his desire to correct her mistake.

"How then?" she asked.

"Exactly like a corkscrew," he said. "You know how a corkscrew goes."

"Oh, well, never mind," she returned with a little sigh. "I thought perhaps you would know."

"Grey's trick," remarked Shepston quietly.

Tempe had the grace to blush. "Did you know?" she asked Grey.

"Why, I had that little game played on me

a dozen years ago," he said. "But I suppose you thought Canadians lived in the woods and wore skins all the time?"

"No, I didn't," Lady Tempe said casually. "I know it's an old trick, but I've got a bet on with Sibyl Hamilton. I had scored nine to her seven last night, and I thought you were worth trying. We're only playing ten up."

"It's strange how strongly one is tempted to answer that question with a gesticulating finger," remarked Shepston. "I want to do it even now."

"I might have guessed that you knew by the way you put your hands in your pockets," Tempe said; "but you did it rather well. By the way, are you Mother's new Socialist?"

"I didn't realise that her interest was proprietary," retorted Grey.

Tempe laughed pleasantly. "But you are a Socialist, aren't you?" she asked.

"If you mean that I'm peculiarly interested in a certain theory of Socialism—yes," replied Grey. "For the same reasons, I suppose, you might describe yourself as a spiralist."

"Another trick to Grey," said Shepston.

"He is rather smart, isn't he?" Tempe remarked, looking up at her uncle; and then she

turned to Grey and said, evidently on a sudden impulse, "I wish you would come and stay at Stratton on the fifteenth—will you? It'll be frightfully dull, but I expect you'd find the country jolly if you don't know it."

"And you think that I should be interesting as a curiosity; that I might alleviate the dullness for you?" added Grey.

"You might," replied Tempe, unabashed.

"You take too many risks, Lady Tempe," said Grey quietly, as he rose to his feet.

He was glad to go now. He felt that his presence there was a protest against the air of the house. He had wanted to see these people, and he thought he knew all that he had come to learn. They might not be shallow, but all their interests were superficial, he thought. Lady Downham and her exquisitely groomed son were negligible, but this uncle—Grey had not heard his name mentioned—evidently a man of some ability, was so involved in the affairs and interests of this one family of Stratton that he could calmly watch Lady Tempe try to fool a perfect stranger, and accept that rudeness as a vagary excusable by her position. And Lady Tempe herself was not a simpleton. In his mind Grey tried to dismiss the inevitable pre-

judice created by her beauty, and to judge her without bias as an intelligent young woman. He tried to picture her roughing it in a shack, with a coarse apron, bare arms, and hair screwed into a knot; but the picture was unconvincing. He saw a girl who was not Lady Tempe, but merely wore her superficial physical likeness. She herself was so much in harmony with her setting that to destroy the setting was to destroy also the portrait. That Goodwood frock of hers in two softly contrasted shades of tan, repeated in her hat and echoed in her gloves, shoes, and stockings, so admirably threw up the dark glow of her eyes and hair. How much thought, time, and money must have gone to the production of that effect. She could not be more than twenty or twenty-one; yet, if that costume was of her own designing, she must already be a finished artist.

He had not taken the invitation seriously; he had heard enough that afternoon to convince him that Lady Downham's daughter was a creature of tricks and sudden whims, and he was startled when Shepston said:

"We should certainly be very glad to see you at Stratton for a few days, Grey, if you haven't any other engagements."

Grey's face expressed the question he did not care to speak: "Why should they trouble to ask him to stay at Stratton?"

"That's very kind of you," he said, with obvious reserve and hesitation.

Shepston turned to his sister. "I am asking Mr. Grey if he would permit himself to be bored by a visit to Stratton in August," he said.

Lady Downham smiled pleasantly. "How good of you," she said to Grey. "We've had no chance of discussing your book this afternoon. Now in Devonshire we shall have plenty of time, and you must really give me a proper explanation of it all. Any day after the fifteenth that will suit you." She answered his bow with a careless nod and continued what appeared to be an expostulation with the sulky Lord Stratton. Grey's acceptance was evidently regarded as a matter of course.

"Could you manage the seventeenth?" supplemented Shepston.

"May I write to you?" returned Grey. "I can't be sure for the next day or two. I may be going back to Ottawa."

Shepston nodded; and Grey, finding that the butler was standing by the open door,

bowed and retreated. The four other occupants of the room were talking among themselves, oblivious of his presence before he had left the room.

4

He threw back his shoulders as he walked down the steps into Portman Square. He had had a new experience that afternoon. These people and their manners had been strange and unexpected. They were, for instance, quite unlike Lord and Lady Dalesworth, who had stood for him as the type of the English aristocracy. The Dalesworths had been gracious and polite. Lord Dalesworth, in his easy, self-possessed way, treated everyone with an air of friendliness while maintaining a certain dignity that forbade the least attempt at familiarity. Lady Dalesworth had been more formal in her relations, and had at times a faintly patronising manner. But these Strattons had no airs of dignity. They had not, with the exception of Lady Downham's brother, troubled to be polite. They had treated him as they might have treated an intelligent child, making no attempt to disguise their own ignorance and yet serenely con-

fident of some superiority in themselves that put criticism out of the question.

Grey shrugged his broad shoulders. He was intrigued by some unfamiliar quality in the experience, but he could not decide whether he would accept that invitation to Devonshire. His purpose in coming to London had been achieved; he had seen and conversed with three of the four members of that family which was to him of such peculiar interest; he would gain nothing by any further intimacy. Had he not better return to Canada and take up his work again? He had gained new material for sociological study.

When he arrived at his hotel he went into the coffee-room and found a peerage. All the information to be gleaned from that work of reference was known to him—except the name of Lady Downham's brother, which he noted as the Hon. Reginald Shepston. But he wanted to review it all again, the dignities and possessions and the antiquity of the title that dated back to Edward Stratton, created first Baron Stratton in the reign of Edward I.

He wanted to pause for a moment on the wonderful reflection that all these dignities and possessions could belong to him, Arthur Strat-

ton, or Arthur S. Grey as he had always been known, if he cared to stretch out his hand and take them!

He smiled grimly and closed the bulky peerage with a soft thud. All that wealth and honour tempted him no more than the sight of a diamond tiara in the window of a Bond Street jeweller.

CHAPTER II

THE DISINHERITED

1

ARTHUR GREY'S philosophy had come to him from his mother, both by an inheritance of her temperament and by the influence of her teaching. She had been a woman of quite unusual capacity and intelligence, biased only by one outstanding prejudice: her contempt for the English family of Stratton, known to her by a single member whom she had married when she was nineteen.

The late Marquis of Downham's first marriage to his cousin Lady Alice Yaxley, the third daughter of the Duke of Liverpool, had not been a success. Their two elder children died in infancy, and the third child, Edward, although apparently sound otherwise in body and mind, developed an idiosyncrasy that is politely described as kleptomania. His mother, after shocking Society for ten years, eloped with a professional singer, and left her son to the care

of a father who had no affection for him; and the stepmother who succeeded Lady Alice when the divorce had been made good, found too much occupation with her own three children to spend her interest in the welfare of the boy who had robbed her son Richard of the title of Earl of Stratton and of heirship to the celebrated Marquisate of Downham.

Almost inevitably Edward grew up to become a plague and terror to his father, who would gladly have disinherited him had not the strictness of the entail made such an act impossible. Stratton's chief failing was his utter irresponsibility. He appeared to act as his mood prompted, without a single thought of any possible consequences; and his weakness for pocketing any valuable that caught his fancy at the moment, increased as his opportunities for theft widened.

It was the threatened action of a Bond Street jeweller that finally decided Lord Downham to send his son to Canada. Stratton was twenty-seven at that time. People who knew him slightly described him as a man of considerable personal charm. He had graceful, easy manners. He treated his groom and the duke, his grandfather, with precisely the same air of faint

deference. He met any rebuke with the acknowledgment that he was to blame, listened patiently and attentively to threats or entreaties, and then proceeded to repeat his offences as if he were incapable of the least self-control.

When old Lord Downham insisted upon a voyage to Canada and a decently long residence in that country, Stratton conceded the necessity without demur, and he was exiled, in company with a carefully chosen tutor, without having entered a single protest against his sentence of banishment.

What happened in Canada the Stratton family never knew, but some fourteen months later the black sheep came back to England alone and exhibiting the first symptoms of general paralysis, a disease of which he died some eighteen months after his return. The tutor, a certain William Hayles, had presumably remained on the far side of the Atlantic. Probably he was aware that he had failed in his trust; in any case, Lord Downham heard no more from him.

So the Strattons heaved a deep sigh of relief, buried the scapegrace with all necessary ceremony, and gave more attention than ever to Richard, the new heir, a somewhat unintelligent

but steady youth of twenty-two, who promised to maintain all the traditions of the family.

2

As a fragment of history in the life of an old British family, this story of Edward, Lord Stratton, presents no aspect of peculiar interest. The old Lord Downham's first marriage had been an unfortunate one, but when the last evidence of it was decently interred in the family vault (Lady Alice had died years before in Baden) no permanent stain soiled the Stratton escutcheon. As the years passed, the memory of Edward's doings was toned down to a reasonable propriety. The kleptomaniac and his utter failure to recognise any code of morality were forgotten, and he figured in the family tradition as a young man of gentle manners with a regrettable but quite aristocratic weakness for enjoying life as he found it.

The old world makes such allowances for its hereditary nobility, but the brief incursion of Lord Stratton into Canada exhibits him in quite another character.

Janet Grey, for example, saw him with very different eyes, both before and after her brief experience of married life.

At first he figured as some strange incarnation of romance. That pleading, deferential manner of his, the grace and charm of his individuality, appeared as the amazing renascence of chivalric knighthood. He had dropped his title and passed as Mr. Edward Stratton, but her intuitions told her that he came of another race, almost of another species.

She was working then as clerk in a small hotel in Toronto. Hayles, the tutor, had chosen a small hotel because he wanted to avoid the temptations that any display presented to his charge. They had been in Canada for more than three months at that time, and Hayles was sick of his job. He was well paid, but the anxieties and constant tension he endured had nearly worn him out. He was considering his resignation when Stratton sprang the new surprise by announcing that he was going to marry Janet Grey, the hotel clerk.

There was no one to consult or, at that distance from England, to raise objections. The girl was an orphan, and had been earning her own living in the hotel for two years. But what weighed with Hayles—a point, perhaps the only one, that must be urged in his defence—was that Janet Grey seemed to offer a hope of Stratton's

reform. She was so capable and so self-controlled. She excelled in all those qualities that Stratton lacked. If Hayles's nerves had not been worn thin by the strain of the past three months, he would not have taken this consideration into account; he must have been clutching at straws at that time, but it is certain that from the first he hardly raised any opposition to his charge's proposal. No doubt his sojourn in Canada had had some influence upon him. He had been freed to a certain extent from that servile attitude toward the greater English nobility which is characteristic of his class. The only representative of the adored aristocracy he had seen since he left Liverpool was the feeble creature whom he had come to loathe, and the traditions that would have ruled him in Devonshire may have appeared paltry and meaningless after even a superficial study of Canadian independence.

Excuses might certainly be made for Hayles if he had shown more courage, but it is obvious that he was aware of his own disloyalty; for while he raised but the feeblest objection to the marriage, he insisted that it must be kept secret. Stratton agreed without demur, and Janet was easily persuaded when she learnt from Hayles

the style and prospects of the man she was going to marry. Expedience, temporary only, but immediately necessary, was the form the argument took, and it must have seemed valid enough. The tutor was not sufficiently honest or courageous to give an outline of Stratton's character and past history, but it is doubtful whether Janet would have believed him if he had. She was infatuated just then, as even a woman of her strength and resolution may be at this one particular crisis of life. She guessed that her lover was weak, but his very weakness was one of the chief of his attractions.

They were married legally but furtively, and left Toronto the same day, and the only witness who knew the contracting parties was William Hayles.

3

Janet's illusions concerning Edward Stratton were broken within three days of her marriage. There was a deep strain of Puritanism in her character, and her husband had not the most elementary conceptions of morals or decency. If she had not been a woman of exceptional resolution she would not have endured him for

the six weeks that marked the limit of their marital relations.

She meant to reform him, of course; but the man was incapable of reformation. Reproaches, pleading, or command had no effect of any kind upon him. He had every outward appearance of sanity, but he was no more subject to influence than a congenital idiot. Nevertheless, Janet would have persisted for some time longer if her husband had not come within the clutches of a law that was more rigorous and less easily placated than the laws of his own country.

The theft was not quite characteristic of his recognisable kleptomaniacal tendencies, since the object of it was a bundle of not too clean dollar bills which could not have appealed to the lust of his eyes. Moreover, the details of his approach to the felony bore evidences of some deliberation. He had spent most of the money before he told his wife—so casual an admission could not be called a confession. He appeared to believe that Hayles possessed some omnipotent authority that could save the criminal from the threatened consequences of his crime.

Hayles, largely relieved of the more exigent duties that had devolved upon him, had nevertheless kept his charge under observation. He

was still receiving his salary and sending weekly reports to Devonshire or Portman Square, omitting any references that might hasten Lord Stratton's recall to England. But when this new complication was thrust upon him, Hayles lost his head. He had only one suggestion to make, and that was instant flight.

Even Stratton was faintly intimidated, a fact that may explain his casual desertion of Janet four days after they had escaped. When he was found and arrested a fortnight later, he was living with another woman and passing under the name of Brown.

He adhered to that name on the advice of Hayles, who saw him in prison when he was brought back to the little township in which he had been living with Janet. Hayles's one object now was to keep the criminal's identity from becoming known, an object that was achieved without much difficulty. The name of Stratton was reasonably supposed to have been the alias and Brown the patronymic. Janet was in Ottawa, and did not appear at the trial. She had finished for ever with the heir to the Marquisate of Downham. She was just then the most shocked and outraged woman in the Dominion.

The trial of Edward Brown, who genially pleaded guilty to stealing 150 dollars in bills, the property of Richard Pryce, hotel keeper, created no particular sensation in that little township of 6,000 inhabitants. The case was reported in the local paper in the ordinary course, but any version that appeared in more important journals was too brief to include the fact that the prisoner had been using the name of Stratton. He received a sentence of nine months' imprisonment, and Mr. William Hayles remained in the neighbourhood and continued to send quite unalarming reports to Devonshire or to Portman Square and to receive his own and his charge's allowances.

But he sent in his resignation a week before Lord Stratton's release, and saw that nobleman off on his return journey to Liverpool ten days later.

Hayles had no fear that Stratton would give his family any particulars of his life in Canada. He had no gift for elaborate confessions, and if he made any casual references to his wife or to the inner workings of a Canadian prison, the chances were that no one would take him seriously; and, in any case, Mr. William Hayles would be beyond reach of the law. His failure

to report essentials was not criminal, and he had been careful to keep no money that he could not account for. Lord Stratton went home provided with the savings of the nine months' allowance that had accrued to him during his period of enforced economy.

Hayles stayed in Canada and became a prosperous citizen.

4

That sharp, bitter experience left a flaw on the character of Janet Grey. She was violently prejudiced in this single particular. In the first few years after her son was born—years of hard struggle to earn a livelihood—she watched him with doubt and suspicion. If he had inherited his father's likeness, whether physical or temperamental, it is probable that Janet would have killed him. She was not perfectly sane at that time in her hatred for the man who had so terribly outraged her every sense of decency. But although she searched her little son with a prejudice that might all too easily have created the sign it sought, she was never able to detect a feature or a trait of character that caused her to wince with the fear of recognition. Perhaps

her very bias saved her. Her image of Edward Stratton may have become so distorted that it no longer bore any remarkable likeness to the original.

Certainly, Arthur Grey inherited his mother's character, while in general physique, in colouring, and in certain tricks of gesture he continually reminded her of the adored father she had lost when she was fourteen years old. No doubt ever marred the intimate, ideal relations of mother and son after he was six or seven years old.

And as she became ever more sure of him, and as the bitterness of her hatred against his father was gradually dissipated and forgotten, her old prejudice took a new shape. She became eager to give her boy what she considered to be a broad view of Society. She had an apprehensive intellect, and she educated herself in order that she might pass on her specialised education to him.

Until Arthur was fifteen she endured many hardships in the struggle to maintain existence. It seemed that the luck was against her, so often was she within sight of a relative independence that was always denied her. But even when she was harassed by the threat of possible starvation,

she persisted in her endeavours to buy or to borrow the particular literature which had become her only reading.

The tide of her fortune turned when she was thirty-four years old. She obtained the post of manageress to a second-rate hotel in Ottawa, and seven years later, on the death of the proprietor, she was able to borrow the money that gave her the controlling interest in a venture that increasingly prospered. When she died, worn out by incessant overwork, her son found himself in possession of enough capital to provide him with a yearly income of some 3,000 dollars.

He was a man of thirty-one at that time, and a professor of economics in an American university. He had written and published one or two essays that had attracted some attention in professorial circles, and was engaged upon the book that was to embody his whole theory of sociology. The death of his mother interrupted that work for a time. They had been utterly devoted to each other, and for six months he was as destitute of any interest in life as a widowed lover.

But presently his determination reasserted itself. He realised that he must go forward with the work for which his mother had educated him

at such a cost. And as he took up the threads again his old enthusiasm returned. He had resigned his professorship, he was independent of any profession now, and he devoted all his energies to that book which had failed so completely to absorb the interest of Lady Downham in Portman Square.

"The Mountains of the Moon" had only been published some six months when, at the age of thirty-three, Arthur Grey went to England for the first time; but already it had brought him considerable recognition and the promise of a large addition to his income.

His trip to Europe was undertaken for educational purposes. He wanted to study at first hand the conditions and theories that obtained in the older civilisations; but he wanted also to meet some members of that family from which he was descended. He was anxious to investigate their attitude towards life and the problems of sociology, to understand, if possible, the true cause of difference between their outlook and his own. His mother had told him the whole story without reserve when he had come to manhood; but, whether by reason of the manner of her telling or because her specialised education of him had become an essential

part of his outlook, he had never for one moment been tempted by any thought of claiming his position as a member of the titular aristocracy. The thought of it was farcical, although the material of the claim was quite indisputable.

William Hayles, in his sixtieth year, witness not only to the marriage but also to the identity of Lord Stratton, was a hale and prosperous merchant in Toronto. . . .

5

After he had returned the bulky peerage to the coffee-room bookcase, Grey went out to walk round and round the unfrequented pavement that encircles the gardens in the centre of Russell Square. His mind was full of the thought that he was surrounded by those symbols that marked the prestige accorded to the important figures of an era that was surely passing away. He was conscious of a feeling of elation and power, of superiority to the false standards which could endure that statue of the Duke of Bedford facing so stolidly and yet so self-consciously towards the heart of London. This man and his kind had done something, no doubt, to improve the condition of their depend-

ants; but they had been so blind, so absurdly inflated with their sense of a position that was hardly less than royal. They had imagined an insuperable barrier between themselves and what they considered to be the lower orders of mankind—as if God had created two species, the rulers and the ruled, as distinct from each other as the horse and the ass. And so sure had they been of that distinction, and so relentless in the use of their property to maintain it, that here, in the old world, the masses had grown to accept the division as one of the manifestations of the eternal purpose.

Grey shrugged his shoulders with a touch of impatience. He had been standing before the bull-necked, curly-haired, self-satisfied image of the statue, and he turned away from it as from the representation of a stolid complacency that was no longer the most important factor in the sociological problem. The aristocracy had had its day in England. It still bore an appearance of solidity, but the tradition was being destroyed by the new aristocracy of wealth represented by the pretentious, protesting architecture of the Hotel Russell that occupied a large proportion of one side of the square.

To him, both representations seemed the

symbols of a stage in progress that the world had outgrown. Beyond them was some ideal of fraternity, of co-operation among men, of a common purpose, of a well-being that should include all humanity. It was no unattainable ideal, no impossible Utopia, but it demanded self-sacrifice, a denial of any personal striving toward the power of wealth and position, a refusal to work for purely personal ends. He was not conscious that he was endowing the new race of men he so clearly visualised with those characteristics he had inherited from his mother; he was only aware of a certainty that all the vices and evils of civilisation had sprung from the meanness of personal ambition.

His thoughts turned to the family he had met for the first time that afternoon. They were harmless, well-meaning people, no doubt; but they had no true sense of their responsibilities. They were blinded by the tradition that enwrapped them. And then, with a sudden emotion that was almost pity, he thought of Lady Tempe. Surely she must still be open to influence? She was too young finally to have accepted the fetish of rank and position as the only god worthy of service? Might he not do something toward opening her eyes to the

futility of those old superstitions? And there was Shepston, too; he also had shown behind the veil of his defensive mannerisms some indication of truer perceptions.

Grey stopped and looked up into the deepening blue of the evening sky. Even in London one could catch a glimpse of eternal things. He was thinking that if after all he accepted that invitation to Stratton, his time would not be wasted. He would have a unique opportunity to study the inside workings of a great estate and the psychology both of the rulers and their dependants. And he might do some work in opening the eyes of the younger generation to the truths of life.

He knew perfectly well that he had been asked because none of the Strattons' friends would visit them in Devonshire in mid-August. He was a *pis aller;* a kind of jester to alleviate the dullness of that traditional sojourn imposed by the head of the family. The thought amused him. He was, in the Strattons' opinion, a member of the lower orders; someone whom they could patronise as it pleased them, and then forget.

Before he returned to his hotel he had decided to accept the invitation.

CHAPTER III

STRATTON

1

Some intimation of the attitude that might be expected from dependants on the great estate was provided when Grey alighted at Cole-Stratton station. He had travelled third class, and the attention of the stationmaster and the one porter was entirely given to the other end of the train until such time as they were satisfied that no first-class passenger was proposing to get out at that stopping-place. It seemed as if the train itself had been made up to accommodate Stratton convenience, for the one first-class coach was at the forward end, and had stopped precisely opposite a platform building that was markedly differentiated from the other offices. It was, indeed, the Stratton private waiting-room, and before the door of it stood two menservants in livery.

For a few moments Grey did not realise that these two impressive individuals had come to

meet him and to relieve him of all responsibility on leaving the station. He had been willing to wait patiently until the porter could spare time to take out his two modest bags from the van; he had even been prepared to walk up to the house, carrying his gripsack, and leaving his heavier luggage to follow. He had written to Lady Downham, giving the day, but not the time of his arrival.

He walked up the platform and addressed the porter.

"I've got two bags down there," Grey said, pointing to the luggage that the guard had ejected from the van.

"Where'm they to be took to?" asked the porter, holding out his hand for Grey's ticket.

"Stratton," replied Grey.

"Cole-Stratton?" returned the porter, with the air of one who politely corrects a stranger's ignorance.

"That's the name of the village, isn't it?" Grey said. "No; I'm going up to the house, to Lord Downham's."

The two menservants, standing within earshot, had appeared rigidly oblivious of Grey's presence until the magic word was spoken, but at the sound of it they suddenly came to life.

One of them instantly turned and came forward, and the hands of both of them were automatically raised in salute.

"Mr. Grey? Yes, sir. The automobile is outside, sir," said the man who had undertaken the ambassadorial function.

Grey had his ticket in his hand, and the ambassador respectfully relieved him of the burden.

"I have two bags——" began Grey.

"I will attend to the luggage, sir," was the assurance he received. Plainly no visitor to Stratton must be fatigued by the necessity for identifying his own luggage.

The attitude of every man on the station had wonderfully changed. The stationmaster and his underling had withdrawn to a respectful distance, but stood as if in attendance until Stratton affairs should be magnificently disposed of; and the three or four other passengers had all turned to gaze curiously as if they might be honoured by the sight of Royalty, or at least of a member of the Cabinet.

Grey found himself being passed on to the second of the two menservants, who ushered him through the private waiting-room to the door of the motor that stood in a perfectly kept

gravel sweep, surrounded by an edging of closely mown grass and a border of flower beds, backed by a thick hedge of magnificent rhododendrons.

This was Lord Downham's private entrance to the station. The common people made their exit through the booking-office to the approach that led down under a bridge to the village of Cole-Stratton on the farther side of the line. On this side the park stretched down to the railway, and the two and a half miles of gravel road that separated the Hall from the station lay entirely through this sacred private property unviolated by any public right of way.

The second servant had mounted the front of the motor beside the chauffeur; the first was left to follow in a second motor with the luggage.

"Good God!" murmured Grey, as he threw himself back into the padded depths of fawn velvet-covered cushions.

2

THE motor covered the two and a half miles in slightly under four minutes, climbing most of the way, and Grey had little chance to admire

the beauties of the park. He received an impression of magnificent timber, here and there he caught a flying glimpse of dim blue distances, of far hills and woods seen across a wide valley; for a quarter of a mile the road ran parallel to a bright, clear stream that continually splashed into white falls and rapids, and then he entered the broad mile-long avenue of old elms and saw the great façade of Stratton Hall, brilliant in August sunlight.

The house was a disappointment. The old Hall had stood on lower ground, half a mile farther north, and had been built on the site of the original keep. All that Elizabethan structure had been destroyed by fire during the Civil War in the days of the third Earl of Stratton, and only a carefully preserved ruin now remained. The present Hall had been built by the first marquis in the reign of George I., and presented a flat, pedimented elevation, with a wide balustraded terrace and a classic portico that seemed out of place in this typical English scenery.

The motor swept round to the right at the head of the avenue, skirted a raised Italian garden, blazing now with scarlet geraniums, and then slowed down to take the wide, mounting

curve of the drive that ran through the arch of a gateway to the flight of absurdly shallow steps that led up to the portico.

Grey was received by Garton, the thick-set, red-cheeked butler, who spoke with a Devonshire accent, and had been in service with the family for thirty-eight years. He was assisted by two unpowdered footmen in dark blue livery.

"Mr. Shepston is in the small library, sir," Garton said, "unless you would prefer to go to your own rooms."

"Thanks, I should prefer to see Mr. Shepston," replied Grey.

"Shall I take your keys, sir?" asked Garton.

"Eh?" ejaculated Grey.

"The keys of your luggage, sir," Garton prompted him.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Grey, and handed them over with a doubtful thought of what the valet would find in his portmanteaux. He had not packed with any anticipation of servants' scrutiny.

He had visited the country houses of American millionaires, but this place had a different air. It was not the signs of wealth that made him uncomfortable, but rather some

remote, unapproachable atmosphere of dignity. He was conscious of a sense of humility that irked and annoyed him and induced an unnatural brusqueness in his manner when he was confronted with the perfunctorily smiling Shepston.

"Georgian architecture, all this," Grey remarked when they had shaken hands. "It shocked me in a way. I had pictured something more Gothic in tone." He felt an overwhelming desire to depreciate the place, to deny that anything about it could ever impress or intimidate him.

"Yes, the old place was smashed up by Cromwell," replied Shepston in his thin high tenor that was almost a falsetto. "This is bad Renaissance, the sort of blundering, heavy-handed stuff they did in the days of the first Hanoverians; modernised, happily, to the extent of electric light and bathrooms."

Grey nodded and looked up at the elaborately moulded and too lofty ceiling. He had a feeling of walking about at the bottom of a shaft. The architect had planned his proportions to suit the larger apartments, and in the smaller rooms the effect was rather that of a rectangular prism stood on end.

"Done by a pupil of Wren's," remarked Shepston. "Beastly ugly, some of it." He paused for a moment and looked round as if in search of further material for criticism, and then went on, "I expect you'd like to go upstairs. Dinner will be ready in half an hour or so. There'll be nobody but ourselves and Lady Adelaide Stratton, Downham's aunt."

Grey understood that a dinner jacket and black tie were suggested as the proper uniform for the occasion, and he wondered if Shepston had made an opportunity to see him solely in order to give him this hint.

He dismissed the valet whom he found waiting for him in his rooms—a sitting-room, bedroom, and bathroom *en suite*. On this floor also he saw that the proportions were bad. Without doubt his own suite had been designed as a single apartment, and had been cut up by partitions to suit more modern requirements. But the outlook from the big windows—they were double-hung sashes, divided by great sash-bars two inches wide—was a compensation. His rooms faced north, and on this side the park fell rapidly, opening a view of the broad Devonshire valleys. The sun had set, but the sky was

still bright, and he could make out the dark blue outlines of broken woods, and on the horizon the black silhouette of a distant hill stood up against the afterglow.

The prospect moved him. The beauty and placidity of it all seemed to be his first sight of the English spirit. His ancestors had lived in this country for long centuries. A little to the west he caught the gleam of that bright little river that followed the road to the station, and beyond the farther bank the grey pinnacle of a ruined wall showed faintly against the heavy background of foliage. That was the true Stratton, no doubt—what was left of it; the old Elizabethan house built on the foundations of the castle that dated from the creation of the title in the days of Edward I.

He had no wish to possess Stratton, but some impulse in him stirred the desire to claim kinship with it, to assert his relation to its place in history, its associations with seven hundred years of English life. If his father had been a younger son he might almost have been tempted to proclaim himself. Any such assertion would not affect his life's work; indeed, it would enormously enhance his power to reach and impress a larger audience. As a member of

the historical house of Stratton he could command attention.

He smiled at the absurdity of his dreams and turned back to the darkening room. The sound of a low rumbling gong reverberated through the house and woke him to the fact that he had been given only half an hour to dress, and that he had probably spent the whole of that time in gazing out of the window and dreaming fantastic dreams.

He was not flurried, but he began to dress quickly. Everything had been made easy for him. A shirt had been laid out and his studs fitted; a collar and a black tie had been chosen; his dress-clothes were all ready to his hand. There had been no need for Shepston to give him any hint, and it seemed unlikely now that that was the object of that brief reception. No, probably Shepston had been there in order to receive him. Lady Downham had been dressing, and in any case she would probably not have troubled, and her brother, with an inborn politeness, had tried to put their visitor at his ease, to make him feel that he was a welcome guest.

3

He found that his haste had been unnecessary when he had been guided by Garton into another of those prism-like apartments on the ground floor. The room was empty, and he paced up and down for nearly five minutes before Lord Stratton entered somewhat hurriedly.

"Hallo!" he said when he saw Grey, and offered him a limp hand.

"Pater not down?" he went on, when the apparently empty ceremony had been happily got over.

"I haven't seen him," Grey said.

Stratton gave himself a kind of congratulatory shake.

"You never know," he remarked. "Sometimes he's down on the tick, and if we're late he sulks all through dinner."

An elaborate Louis Quinze clock on the high carved stone mantelpiece tinkled out a finicking little chime.

"There you are," said Stratton; "quarter-past—quarter of an hour late. You come from America, don't you?"

"Canada," replied Grey; "but I've lived in America."

"Ever seen Travis?" inquired Stratton.

For a moment Grey was nonplussed, and then he saw that his companion was playing an imaginary putt on the hearthrug.

"Oh, the golfer?" he said. "No, I've never met him."

"Saw him over here the year he won the championship," Stratton said. "Been practising that putt of his more or less ever since. We've got a rotten little eighteen holes through the park. You play?"

"Yes," admitted Grey. "But I haven't brought my clubs to England."

"You can have the pater's," Stratton said. "He's only used 'em twice. Doctor recommended him golf for exercise."

He spoke in short sentences in the intervals of practising his imaginary putts. "Only thing to do down here—before September."

He hardly looked up from his occupation when his father entered, followed by Shepston.

Lord Downham was a tall man, and would still have been handsome had it not been for the shape of his head. He was bald, save for a tuft of dark hair above each ear, and his cranial

development was narrow and long and suggested an ivory mallet with a conical end. Seen full-face, he gave an impression of intellectuality, an impression that was heightened by his abstracted, thoughtful air. But it was impossible to take his profile seriously. He had the reputation of being a man of exceptional ability. His speeches in the House of Lords were never eloquent, and he was hopeless in debate, but whenever he came prepared to open or oppose an important measure he always showed considerable grasp of his subject, and his opinions were quoted as authoritative in Conservative journals, and treated with decent respect by the Liberals.

Shepston came forward and made the introduction.

Lord Downham looked up thoughtfully, adjusted the pince-nez he always wore, and said, "Ah! very pleased indeed."

Grey bowed, and was preparing to rush into the safe topic of architecture when Lady Downham came in with her daughter and Lady Adelaide Stratton.

At the same moment the boom of the gong, subdued now in volume, rumbled again from the inner hall.

Lord Downham turned to his wife. "Er—shall we go in?" he said. "I'm afraid we're all very late to-night."

Lady Downham gave an inclusive assent to both propositions.

There was no formality in their exit from the smaller drawing-room across the hall to the big dining-room, and Grey found himself walking by the side of Lady Tempe.

"Did you get your tenth victim?" he asked.

She understood his allusion at once, "Yes, absolutely on the post," she said. "Sibyl and I were nine all, and then I got the Prime Minister at dinner. He was splendid. He spiraled his finger up and up till he was nearly out of his chair, and Sibyl was right opposite and shrieked. Everyone looked, and I had to explain it all to him, but he was very jolly about it." She broke off, and then, as they entered the dining-room, she said, "You're sure to be next Aunt Adelaide at dinner; don't be shocked at the way she eats—she does it on a theory, y' know."

The dining-room was evidently one of those Stratton apartments that had set the architect's scale of proportions. The coffered and wonder-

fully enriched ceiling was not here the lid of a box, but an integral part of the design. The room had an effect of dignity; apart from its relation to the rest of the mansion, it was well and justly designed. But the very scale and rightness of its proportions made it spectacular. The tiny group of seven dwarfed human beings, avoiding the wilderness of mahogany that had been moved slightly back from the centre of the room, and dining at what appeared quite a small circular table set in a corner, might have been some out-of-season party taking refuge in the barren spaces of a vast deserted hotel. Not until they were all seated did Grey realise that the "small" round table in the corner could have offered comfortable accommodation to twelve people.

As a social function, dinner could not be counted a success. Lady Downham, with the complete disregard of tact that was one of her more salient characteristics, opened the topic of Socialism. Evidently she had read some portions of her guest's essay since they had last met, and was more than a little inclined to congratulate herself on having successfully mastered a very intricate subject.

"So you think the Government ought to

manage everything for us?" she began by way of a cheerful opening.

Lord Downham's views on that point, however falsely enunciated by his wife, were as well known in England as the Albert Memorial, and he frowned slightly, looked immensely erudite, and then became greatly interested in his soup.

But before Grey could take up the challenge Lady Adelaide said suddenly, "So you're another of us cranks, eh? Glad to hear it. Mine's Fletcher. The stomach's vestigial, and we want juices; solids choke the passages. I hesitated between Metchnikoff and Fletcher, but I chose Fletcher because I've got a palate, and sour milk made me sick. The theory is——"

"Oh, aunt, *don't!*" screamed Lady Tempe. "It's bad enough to see you do it, but if you're going to explain I shall have my dinner upstairs."

Lady Adelaide chuckled. She must have been a woman of nearly seventy, but Fletcherism seemed to have agreed with her, for she was exceedingly active and alert, and her skin was tanned a fine brown down to a hard line about her still decently plump neck.

"Tempe's squeamish," she said. "Young

gels gen'lly are. I s'pose you're one of the mild Socialists, eh? All theory and no practice? I've more respect for the other kind, but I don't want to sit next 'em at dinner."

"Mr. Grey is going to convert us all to his theory," put in Lady Downham. "I'm half converted already. But there are one or two things I must have explained to me."

Lady Adelaide was steadily chewing and only grunted, and Grey at last found an opportunity to speak. He felt very like Alice between the two Queens. He knew that nothing he might say to Lady Downham would be understood.

"I think," he said, struggling to find some clear ground for his enunciation of theory, "I think most of the misapprehension arises from the abuse of the word 'Socialism.' I never used it in my book."

"But you *are* a Socialist?" Lady Downham interposed, almost on a note of expostulation.

He looked up at Lady Tempe and saw that she was smiling. Shepston had been engaged by Lord Downham, who was talking across his daughter. Stratton was lost in meditation, probably reconsidering Travis's skill in putting

from a new angle. Grey realised that he was cut off from any present hope of relief.

"I believe in a collective purpose," he said, with a touch of brusqueness; "but I don't believe in labels or in cut-and-dried schemes. I've a certain faith in the possibilities of humanity, and I want to see those possibilities developed."

"Very true," commented Lady Downham gravely. "But I certainly understood from your book that you wanted the Government to manage all our affairs for us, and I'm sure Downham would never trust a Radical Government to do that for him."

"In my Utopia," explained Grey, "there couldn't be any Radicals or Conservatives. We should progress by agreement, not by dispute."

Lady Adelaide had absorbed the juices of the instalment she had been working upon, and seized the opportunity for speech before reloading.

"Don't badger him, Caroline," she said. "Let him talk. He's got a lot to say, and a soothing flow of language'll help our digestions."

Grey leaned desperately back in his chair, and then, looking across the table, he succeeded

in catching Shepston's eye and mutely pleaded for deliverance.

"I don't think you ought to talk Socialism at dinner, Caroline," Shepston said. "Spoils two good things that are excellent apart but don't mix—like caviare and pêche Melba, for instance."

"What a beastly idea," commented Lady Tempe.

Lord Downham touched his pince-nez and cleared his throat, and his wife, who had been about to answer her brother, returned to her fish with a faint expression of weariness.

"My position with regard to the general theory of Socialism," began Lord Downham, paused to wave aside a footman who was standing patiently at his elbow, and then continued, "is that I fear the development of a rigid and almost inhuman bureaucracy." He proceeded to elaborate his judgment with special reference to the parental and human relations possible between an estate owner and his tenants and workmen.

Grey was impressed. The argument was one that needed careful treatment by an opponent. As it was here used it touched upon much that was indisputably fine in the English tradition.

He had no suspicion that Lord Downham was reciting word for word—he had quite a remarkable textual memory—one of his public speeches, nor that the pause which followed a telling period had been originally studied to take the inevitable applause. The pause appeared to offer opportunity for reply, and Grey took it.

"If it were only a question of estate owners such as yourself, Lord Downham," he said, "I would give way at once. It is commercialism that has upset the whole theory of relationship between employer and employed."

Lord Downham blinked with an air of deep wisdom and looked at Shepston, who smiled genially and said:

"Grey comes from a country where there are no hereditary landlords in our sense. I'm going to give him a course of lessons in the old-world theory of estate management during the next few days, and then we shall have common ground for discussion. I particularly want him to meet old Veale—fine chap old Veale. He'll open your eyes to the condition of Devonshire labour, Grey."

"But you'd better stop your ears," put in Tempe; "he's got a voice like a corncrake."

Lord Downham evidently felt that he had

done all that was required of him, and had returned to his interrupted dinner with the stern dignity of a man who pondered deeply as he ate.

"Show you round the links in the mornin'," remarked Lord Stratton—it was his only contribution to the conversation during the whole meal.

"And you must see the ruins of the Hall," said Lady Downham. "They're very picturesque; such a pity some of it couldn't have been used in building this house."

Grey shuddered inwardly at the horribly incongruous picture this suggestion conjured up. "I think I caught sight of those ruins from my window this evening," he said.

Lady Downham became vaguely topographical. "Yes, beyond the close, over the river," she said. "There's a bridge, of course." She wandered pleasantly on to give further equally important details.

Grey found no difficulty in punctuating her explanations with a suitable monosyllable now and again, while he looked round the table. Shepston, having refused ice pudding, was leaning back in his chair staring up at the ceiling; Lord Downham was lost in a brown study; his son was laying out a miniature golf course with

pills of bread; Lady Adelaide, severely handicapped by her methods of gastronomy, steadily chewed her way through some belated course; Lady Tempe was amusing herself with ice pudding.

And it came to Grey that all these people were finally and irremediably bored with life. No interest, no excitement was possible for them. They had no inducement to struggle, nothing to achieve. They had been born to luxury and honour. All the attainment they sought had been theirs from childhood.

He was glad now that he had accepted the invitation to Stratton. He understood the futility of those visions he had dreamed upstairs. If he had not come to this place he would never have realised the vanity of such lives as these, he would not have known how utterly his mother's training of himself had been justified. She had known in some way that it was not good for a man to be born to wealth and prestige. She had never been tempted to claim such empty glories for him, and she had been right beyond all question.

He became conscious that Lady Tempe was regarding him across the table with an attentive stare.

"Are you wishing yourself back in Canada, Mr. Grey?" she asked with an unusual seriousness.

He was confused by the aptness of her question, but Lady Downham saved him from any necessity to make a polite denial.

"I was telling Mr. Grey about the view from Beacon Hill, dear," she said. "Is it warm enough to have coffee on the terrace?"

4

The sky had become overcast since sunset. Heavy clouds, just discernible as a paler darkness, were moving in hasty procession overhead, but not a breath of air disturbed the remote stillness of the great forest trees in the park. The white light from the brilliantly lit rooms within, spread in broad fans across the width of the terrace, threw the squat balusters and panelled newels of the balustrade into sudden relief, and, leaping the curve of the drive, touched here and there the scarlet head of a geranium in the Italian garden beyond.

Grey presently moved a little apart from the group of four people who were sitting by the open casements of the drawing-room

windows—Lady Downham, indeed, was just within the room itself. Tempe and her brother had disappeared, and for the last quarter of an hour the five other members of the party had been carrying on a desultory conversation, chiefly on the topic of the storm that was plainly coming before long. But when Lady Adelaide began some confidence in the ears of her niece, and Lord Downham drifted into a discussion of his tenantry that was obviously unintelligible to anyone but Shepston, Grey got up and walked to the edge of the terrace, and then adventured into the darkness beyond the portico where only one light, burning faintly in the empty spaces of the deserted dining-room, weakly penetrated the gloom of the night.

He turned his back on the wide façade of the mansion and peered down at the dim masses of the park trees. And once again the place called to him, as if some ancient strain in his blood recognised the old landmarks, while the comparative modernity of the house repelled him; that Georgian mansion was an alien, intruding thing. He would certainly go and see those ruins to-morrow, he thought, and he would go alone.

The whisper of silk caught his ear, and he looked up to see Lady Tempe emerge into the thin stream of light that came from one of the dining-room windows. She was coming toward him, and he wondered whether she would see him. He made no movement, thinking that she might pass him in the darkness of the shadow, and then he heard her voice at his elbow.

"Bored?" she asked.

"Not now," he returned on the impulse of the moment.

"Meaning since you left the society of our elders or since I interrupted your—what were they, by the way, dreams or solemn speculations on the future of civilisation?"

"Dreams," he said.

"And the first question?"

"Do you want me to make polite asseverations?"

She laughed lightly, put her hands on the broad coping of the balustrade, and with a quick, easy movement raised herself and swung round into a sitting posture. Her new position brought her so close to him that their hands almost touched.

"Gym.," she remarked. "I can beat

Dickie into fits." And then she went on rapidly, "No, I don't want polite asseverations, if that's Canadian for compliments. You're not good at them, you know. Too heavy."

"Too plain-spoken?" he asked.

"If you like to call it that. I shouldn't. *We* are plain-spoken; you wrap yourself up in solemn phrases. I was dying to tell you to come off it at dinner."

"Are *you* plain-spoken?" Grey asked. "If you want me to be honest, as you seem to, I should have said that you, all of you, 'wrapped yourself up' even more than I do."

"Yes, you don't understand us a bit," returned Tempe, gently lifting herself up and down on her hands. "You've been far too clever about us altogether. You think, for instance, that Mater is a rather silly woman, pretending to take an interest in your Socialism."

He attempted a half-hearted expostulation.

"Of course you do," she went on. "A blind crocodile could see that. But you're quite wrong, and I thought, as you're going to stay with us for a few days, it might be as well to give you a few hints."

"I wish you would," he said.

"I'll begin with my mother, then," she said. "You see, the poor dear is really very bored; anyone would be. But she *is* interested in Socialism, or whatever you like to call it, only she can't manage it alone. I'm sure she doesn't understand half the words in your book. Some of 'em were too much for me, and, though you might not think it, I've had quite a decent education. And then you *are* so ponderous at times. However, the subject of this exposition is your duty to your neighbour, and that is to be more long-suffering and less steam-rollerish, and generally to take us as we are. You mayn't like us, and we mayn't like you, but as we are going to have a pretty dull time down here it's your duty to make the best of it and us."

"I feel very like a schoolboy," Grey said after a short pause.

"Schoolboys yelp and run about and make themselves jolly," commented Tempe. "You're much more like a professor who finds himself talking to an *enfant terrible*."

"I held a professorship in America for two years," he said. "I suppose one cultivates a manner."

"You hadn't got it when you came to

Portman Square. I thought you were going to be rather a lark."

"It is the effect of this house," he said. "It's so spectacular. I'm sorry I was pompous."

"Not pompous," she corrected him; "just a little elephanty. But you're right about the house. It's beastly. We all hate it. Even Father hates it in his heart, though nothing would ever induce him to say so. And it's because he knows we hate it that he insists on our coming here three times a year. He doesn't like to think that the tradition should be broken. I expect he'll make Dickie swear honest Indian on the Bible that he'll keep it up when he inherits."

"But the place, the park, the whole situation is beautiful," protested Grey. "Doesn't that compensate you to some extent?"

"We're so used to doing things, you see," she said.

"Do you never get tired of that, of the endless routine of entertainment?"

She did not answer that question. "Listen!" she said. "It's coming!"

The stillness of the night had been broken. The air was full of a soft rustling that gradually

increased until it was like the sound of waves on a shingle beach, and then fell again to a whispering murmur as if the trees made hushed protestations against the coming invasion. Overhead the hurrying clouds had momentarily thinned and a few pale stars seemed to be hastening across a little lake of open sky towards the refuge of the gathering obscurity. The interval of relative silence lasted for a few moments, and the sound of voices and moving chairs came from the other end of the terrace.

"We'll wait till it begins," Tempe said softly.

Grey nodded. He was listening for the beginning of the next attack. It came more suddenly this time—a rush of wind that spoke with its own voice, a palpable presence that swept past them. A few heavy drops of rain splashed on the terrace. Grey looked up at Lady Tempe. He could see her white dress and the outline of her head set up against the darkness of the background. She was gripping the edge of the coping with her hands and her face was raised to the sky.

"Hadn't you better go in?" he asked.

"When the rain comes," she said quietly.

The rain was hissing furiously on the floor

of the terrace before she leapt lightly down from the balustrade. "Now run!" she said, and set him the example.

They went through the portico into the hall.

5

THE light in the great drawing-room dazzled him after the blackness of the terrace. He came in still padding with his handkerchief at the rain on his shirt-front.

"'Sh!" whispered Tempe at his elbow; and he saw that the little group of four people at the other end of the room were sitting round a card-table. "Auction," Tempe advised him. "Aunt Adelaide's a nailer, and insists on silence."

Grey found his foot slipping on the highly polished surface of the parquet between two rugs, and pulling himself together, made his way down the room with slightly exaggerated precaution against noise. The roaring of the wind and clatter of rain outside sounded remotely, a background for the silence of the interior. All disturbance had been shut away behind closed windows and tapestry curtains.

The two invaders stood by the table for a

few minutes and watched the play of the hands. Shepston had his sister for partner in that particular rubber, and Lady Adelaide on more than one occasion frankly criticised the play of her nephew. She alone of the four appeared fiercely eager to win, and when the rubber was finished and the table cut again for partners she made no secret of her jubilation in cutting with Shepston.

"You get worse every night, Richard," she said to Lord Downham. "I wish you could forget your confounded politics for half an hour while you're playing bridge."

Lord Downham looked up with his usual abstracted air. "Of course. Certainly. No doubt one should," he said. "I will really try to concentrate my attention better."

"Oh, you needn't bother for this rubber," laughed Lady Adelaide.

Lady Downham asked Grey if it were still raining, and then, with an amazing realisation of her duties as a hostess, if he would not like to find her son in the billiard-room.

Grey discovered that Tempe was gravely nodding her head at him from behind her father's chair.

"I should. Certainly," Grey said.

"Tempe will show you," remarked Lady Downham briefly. "What did you say, Reggie? Two spades? Oh, I think two clubs——"

"They do it for Aunt Addie's sake, you know," Tempe said to Grey when they had left the room. "They don't actually try to lose, but they want her to win. Poor Mother's no good at all, and she hates playing; and Father's thinking of something else all the time."

"Do they play for high stakes?" asked Grey.

"No; not really high. Aunt Addie's tremendously pleased if she wins twenty or thirty pounds. She's rather hard up. I have to cut in sometimes. Dickie won't. He isn't keen on any game without a ball. We shall find him upstairs practising shots for all he's worth."

Her prophecy proved to be a true one. Lord Stratton was at the moment confining his attention to middle-pocket losers, with a young footman in attendance to return his ball.

"It's nothin' to get the shot," he explained to Grey. "It's gettin' the position again. I did nineteen runnin' last night. D'you play?"

"Not up to your form, I'm afraid," Grey said.

"Let's play snooker," put in Tempe, "for pennies."

"Oh, I say——" began her brother, but she caught him up quickly.

"Don't be an ass, Dickie," she said. "You know I'm cleared out."

"Sorry!" mumbled Stratton; but Grey understood that it was his own pocket she wanted to save. He made no remonstrance. He was not tempted to win money from these people nor did he wish to lose to them.

"I'll owe thirty," Stratton announced.

Even with that handicap he succeeded in winning over eleven shillings.

Grey excused himself soon after twelve o'clock and went up to his own room. Tempe told him that there was no necessity for any formal making of good nights to the bridge party in the drawing-room. "They won't expect to see us again," she said.

"What time do you have breakfast?" asked Grey.

"Any time you like," Tempe replied. "It'll be there, you know, when you get down."

6

In his own room Grey was seized with a prolonged fit of yawning. The thought came to him that he, too, was going to enter the depths of boredom during the next few days. His mind was enervated and he was conscious of a sense of resentment against the whole family of Stratton. How empty and useless they all were. The only possible exception to the generalisation was Lady Tempe. And already, although she was barely twenty, she, too, had begun to live for the excitement of the hour, for constant diversion, for the strenuous, exhausting search after pleasure. In another twenty years she might become a hard, tired Society figure; or she might find an outlet in some propagandist fad that had the seductive form of useful work; or, again, she might decline to living that frankly sensuous life which in a woman of inferior rank would be condemned as flagrantly and unforgivably immoral. She might become another Lady Paignton.

Arthur Grey shivered slightly and began to pace the ample length of his bedroom. Why had he had that thought, he wondered. Was

it due merely to the effect of the girl's beauty or to some careless audacity in her manner? Undoubtedly she was beautiful. Her features had that delicacy of moulding and contour that he had observed in some American women. But Lady Tempe had more than the beauty of form; her face was alert and expressive, and her dark eyes held the promise of a capacity for deep emotion. She was alive and conscious of life. She would ask for all that life could offer her.

He went to the window, threw up the lower sash, and looked out into the night. The squall that had heralded the storm had passed. All was quiet now, save for the soft hush of steady rain. The smell of the earth came to him delicately altered by the scent of heliotrope, verbena, and geraniums; the primitive, magnificent base sweetened and refined by art and culture.

And that, it seemed to him, was the representative spirit of the place, outside this ostentatious museum of a house. Here, indeed, was the primitive age-old earth that had belonged to his ancestors for seven hundred years, but it had been cultured and toned by centuries of tendance. It had lost the savage strength of

the new lands in the West, and had become humanised, even individualised. Some beauty of grace and, as it were, of slenderness had been added to it; it wore an air of breeding and of immemorial associations.

He had a sudden longing for the power to pull down this Georgian mansion and to rebuild the old Stratton Hall. But even as the desire was born he recognised its futility. No one could re-create the spirit of the old house. Modern labour and materials could do no more than imitate the thing that was past. All this aristocracy of feeling and association was moribund. Something of it lived in the park and about those ruins in the hollow, and it had in its day been a fine and even a useful thing. But the progress of humanity, not of a single family, but of all mankind, could not be stayed. Stratton and its like throughout England were impediments that must be broken down. The new luxury that had arisen out of the prolifications of commerce by the instrument of machinery had become a tool that was undermining the aristocratic tradition, and the tool itself must be broken in the process.

His boredom had passed and given place to the interest and sense of satisfaction of a com-

petently active mind. He wanted work, he reflected, and decided that he would certainly find relief from dullness by working every morning during his stay at Stratton. He would write an article for one of the American reviews on the change that must come to such places as this. He had not seen the library yet, but he understood that it was well stocked. He would find material there for the history of the Strattons, which he could develop to point the inevitableness of the new order.

He turned back into the white brilliancy of his great bedroom, leaving the window wide open. He wished to be soothed to sleep by the gentle, pattering murmur of the rain and the altered scent of the sweet earth.

But when he lay back in bed and switched off the light the thought that came to him was of his mother. She had been right, indubitably right, in her training of him; but one side of life, the side he was now exploring, had been unknown to her. She had done well for him, but she might have made him a bigot. And yet would she, for instance, have condemned Lady Tempe? Probably not, he thought. His mother might have lacked experience, but the fineness of her intuition, the inspiration of her

spirit was such that she could rise far above the limitation of her circumstance. She had had genius.

7

He breakfasted alone the next morning. He was down by eight o'clock, and it was evident that Garton, discovered in his shirt-sleeves, was scandalised by the sight of him at such an unseemly hour.

"Breakfast is served in the mornin'-room, sir," Garton said, and looked anxiously round for his coat. "I'll go and see if it is ready, sir," he added; but having provided himself with an excuse for finding his coat, he paused to administer a hint of rebuke.

"I'm afraid—your 'ot water, sir?" he said.

"I didn't wait for it," replied Grey carelessly. He would have liked to open more human relations with the man, but recognised how impossible it was to make the least overture. He felt that he had certainly been criticised in the servants' hall, and that any approach of his must necessarily fail between condescension and familiarity.

He paced the terrace until breakfast was ready. The sky was still overcast, but the rain

had ceased. The Italian garden looked draggled, but two men were already at work upon it.

The house reminded him more and more of some magnificent hotel.

After breakfast he found the library, and was presently found in turn by its librarian, a thin, sour-looking man of fifty or so, with a ridiculously stilted manner.

Grey was wandering along in front of the endless bookcases, wondering rather hopelessly how he should ever discover the volumes he wanted and debating the possibility of finding Shepston, when Bellingham, the librarian, came in. Grey welcomed him eagerly and was rebuffed.

"Any works bearing on the history of the family of Stratton?" repeated Bellingham, paraphrasing and polishing Grey's inquiry. "Yes; I will initiate you into the system of the catalogue. We have adopted the card index," he explained.

Grey tried valiantly to break through Bellingham's frigidity. *He*, surely, might be treated as an equal.

"Capital system, the card index, isn't it?" Grey said genially. "I suppose you introduced

it yourself? Don't you find that it saves endless labour?"

"The suggestion originated from Mr. Shepston some four years since," replied Bellingham. "It is, as you say, convenient. These are the cases. Each book is indexed three times: under title, author's name, and subject heading. The key to the subject arrangement is on this chart."

"A splendid piece of cataloguing," commented Grey warmly. "I wish they had the same system at the British Museum."

"There are only some twenty-three thousand books here," Bellingham said, "and I have not yet completed the index after four years' work."

He left it to be inferred that the recataloguing of the Museum's millions would entail an eighth labour far exceeding in magnitude the cleansing of the Augean stables. He discovered no sign of pride in his handiwork.

Grey understood that he had been snubbed. "A tremendous undertaking, of course," he said.

"I don't think you will have any difficulty in finding what you want," Bellingham returned. "If you would excuse me now?"

Was this another mark of the tradition? wondered Grey. Was the very librarian afraid of exhibiting some common sign of his humanity? He was annoyed. All the snobberies that cling to an autocracy arise from this subservience of the employed, he thought. Does this fellow think he would presume by treating me as an equal, or does he despise me as being an inferior of the family he serves?

Despite the admirable system of the index, he was a long time in finding the books he required. The impetus to work that had come to him last night was apparently expended. He spent half an hour in criticising the resources of the library under the heading of "Sociology and Allied Subjects." In the former category the most recent addition was Benjamin Kidd's "Social Evolution," and the Economics, beginning inevitably with Adam Smith, ended abruptly with Mill, and the heading was the old one of "Political Economy." And when, at last, he found his books on the family—one of them a liberally illustrated monograph not two years old that contained all the facts he wanted, but was written in a spirit of crawling adulation—he could not settle down to read. He was contemplating a walk across the park

when Shepston came in at twelve o'clock. He was looking refreshingly spruce and neat.

"I thought I might find you here," he said, and he came and sat on the edge of the table at which Grey was sitting. "I'm afraid you won't find much to interest you. As a library it fails. It's late Georgian and early Victorian at their dullest—neither archæological nor useful for modern reference."

"I was reading the history of the Stratton family," Grey said.

"You should get hold of Bellingham, our curator. Have you seen him?" replied Shepston.

"He's in there." Grey nodded towards the closed door of the farther room. "Yes, I saw him, and was snubbed." He turned to his companion with a look of serious scrutiny. "Now, Mr. Shepston, I wish you'd give me a few pointers," he said, unconsciously lapsing into the easier speech which had been overlaid by his professorial manner.

Shepston smiled his orthodox smile. "Go ahead!" he said.

"I want to understand all this," began Grey, with a wide gesture of his right hand. "It's all new to me and I haven't got the key.

I guess, and think I'm guessing right, and then I'm upset by some trivial thing that puts me all wrong again."

"I'm not at all sure that there is a key," Shepston said amiably. "But—for instance?"

"Well, that curator of yours. I wanted to be friendly. I'd thought of trying the butler, but I gave that up. I saw at once that it was hopeless. But this curator of yours: I praised his index—he said it was your idea, by the way; I congratulate you—well, he seemed to have a poker up his back, and the temperature went down to forty below. Now, why was that? Was I supposed to be too high and mighty for him to talk to, or wasn't I good enough for him, or has your system dried out his human juices?"

"In the first place," Shepston said, swaying gently backwards and forwards, "you got him on the raw, I'm afraid. That index you praise is his *bête noire*, poor chap. He has been writing a learned history of the family for ten years—used to have nothing else to do; and then——" He indicated the three cases of index cards. "Takes all his time, you understand. The fellow who wrote that book in front of you finished him. He had Lord

Downham's permission, came down here, pumped Bellingham, got all the information he wanted in a week, and published that monograph. Vile stuff, of course, a flagrant piece of Grub Street book-making; but his facts are accurate and he has used all the most interesting material. Poor Bellingham still goes on, but his book will be as dry as sawdust—published by subscription, with Downham as the subscriber, probably. However, you can understand that Bellingham is still raw, and not particularly in love with the index."

He looked at Grey, with a slightly quizzical smile, through the single unribboned eyeglass that was always so miraculously in its right position.

"Yes, I was unfortunate," Grey said thoughtfully. "I see that, but it doesn't begin to explain the fellow."

"Can you *explain* anyone?" asked Shepston, "yourself, for example?"

"Why, yes, in the sense I mean," Grey said. "In the first place, why didn't your Bellingham write the monograph himself? He had six years start of the other fellow."

"Too scholarly. Too pedantic, if you like."

"And is it his grievance that makes him look as if he had been frozen so stiff that it would take all hell to thaw him out?"

Shepston laughed his thin falsetto laugh. "I remember a curator at the Bodleian who had the same manner," he said.

"I think that helps my point," Grey returned. "It's the influence of the atmosphere they live in. Now, this fellow Bellingham's under the influence of the tradition. He has no use for anything or anyone who isn't part of Stratton. Isn't that so?"

Shepston looked up at the ceiling and sighed almost inaudibly. "Ask me again in a week's time," he said.

"I'll do that," agreed Grey. "But I don't see——"

"Give us a week," interrupted Shepston. "You'll know us better then, and you'll be able to understand any explanation I may have —although I don't think that a verbal explanation is possible."

"There's another thing, if I may be quite frank," Grey said after a moment's thought.

"Butt right in," murmured Shepston.

Grey smiled. "It's just that," he said. "I can talk to you. You've been real friendly

to me, but I get frozen with the others, except, maybe, Lady Tempe. She told me last night that I got wearing my professorial manners. Well, it's true, and I can't seem to help it. I'll be like that fellow Bellingham in a week, and I don't fancy that would help me to understand you any better than I do now."

Shepston was softly whistling under his breath. "I'll enunciate one truth for you," he said, "and you must accept it as gospel."

"Go ahead!"

"I'm the only dishonest person in the family."

"I should have said——"

"I'm being honest now," Shepston went on. "Take this as a brief glimpse of my true self revealed in response to your own delightful candour, and believe me that my sister, her husband, their two children, and Lady Adelaide are simple, unsophisticated human beings, who will welcome the kind of frankness you have just shown to me. If they occasionally make you uncomfortable, remember that in some respects they are as ingenuous as children."

Grey looked puzzled. "Well," he said at last, "I'll try it; but I can't see myself talking like that to Lord Downham."

8

"Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you," replied Shepston, "you may, perhaps, find him a little sore to-day. He has been upset."

"May I ask why?"

Shepston was gently smiling at the bookcase in front of him. "A trivial thing," he said, "but in some ways, I admit, annoying. The morning papers came in half an hour ago, and the *Daily Post* had a small paragraph—a filler, I think you call them—to the effect that we may expect a claimant to the title from Canada."

The thing came so unexpectedly that Grey was staggered. For a moment it seemed to him that he was being charged with a hideous crime that he had, indeed, committed, but had concealed with a finality that had brought him too great confidence. He felt as if the most sacred secret of his life had been suddenly and brutally revealed to the public stare.

"But how's that?" he asked, and wondered if he had changed countenance; so incalculably swift had been the workings of his thought that he believed he had not had time to alter his expression.

Shepston did not appear to have looked at him. "Ah! you haven't turned that page of the family history yet," he said carelessly. "There was an elder brother of Downham's—a half-brother, to be exact—who went to Canada and disappeared for a year. There were reports of him from the tutor who went with him, but the tutor does not seem to have been altogether trustworthy. It is not impossible, you see, that the late Lord Stratton was legally married in Canada, and that he might have had a son."

Grey had pulled himself together. He had had time to weigh possibilities and make some kind of a decision. "How long since was that?" he asked. "I thought the present marquis came into the title more than twenty years ago."

"Yes, he did," agreed Shepston, softly rocking himself to and fro; "he did. And if this hypothetical claimant were alive now he must be at least thirty-three."

"If he ever existed he would surely have shown himself before this," suggested Grey.

"Oh, quite. Without doubt. We are not seriously perturbed," Shepston said. "I only told you in order that you might make allow-

ances for a possible display of ill-temper. Downham is annoyed, you know; quite naturally annoyed. The paragraph is unquestionably due to lack of news in the silly season. The point is, rather, that Downham dislikes that particular family scandal being aired; and a thing like this revives it. People who had forgotten all about it remember and begin to talk again. Are you going out before lunch? We lunch at two."

Grey had but one idea. He must see that paragraph; he must find out, if possible, whence it had been inspired. It might indicate himself, although he had not noticed the least sign of suspicion in Shepston's manner. But he found himself suddenly in the rôle of a conspirator. For perhaps the first time in his life he had some important thing to hide; he was compelled to be cunning and secret, to act an elaborate unconcern. He was certainly not less annoyed over this matter than Lord Downham.

"Yes, I think I'll go for a stroll," he said; considered the advisability of asking if there was any other news of importance, and decided that he dared not risk even that simple question.

"It's clearing up, I think," commented

Shepston, alighting from the table. "I have to see Bellingham," he added, nodded genially, and moved towards the door in the farther room.

Grey went out in the opposite direction. He was debating whether, if he were unable to find the *Daily Post*, he could dare to call in the help of Garton. It seemed to him that he had certainly become a desperate criminal in the last five minutes, confronted with the necessity for every kind of contemptible shift and device.

"I was a damned fool to come to this place," he thought; and went on to consider how soon he might diplomatically leave it.

As he came into the large hall he saw the *Daily Post* conspicuously displayed among other papers on a side table, and sighed his relief. He found the paragraph with little difficulty; it was headed, "Alleged Claim to a Marquisate," and ran:

"A correspondent in Toronto informs us that a claim, well supported by documentary evidence, may shortly be made to the title and estates of the Marquis of Downham. The claimant is asserted to be the son of the late Earl of Stratton, elder brother of the present marquis, and who was resident in Canada for

some months a year or two before his death. Should the information, which comes from a trustworthy source, be corroborated, this will be the third claim made to an English peerage within five years."

Grey was conscious of a sense of present relief. There was nothing here to compromise him; but what could have been the "trustworthy source"? Had William Hayles spoken after all these years?

He looked up and saw Shepston coming towards him.

"Absolutely nothing in the papers," he remarked carelessly as he passed.

"No, nothing," agreed Grey. He was confused. He had an absurd feeling that he had been caught in the performance of some disgraceful and sinister act.

CHAPTER IV

SUSPECT

1

ARTHUR GREY'S first thought after he had heard of that mysteriously informed paragraph in the *Daily Post* was that he must certainly leave Stratton at the earliest possible moment. He had even planned a walk to the village and concocted a reply-paid telegram to an acquaintance in town, the answer to which would give him the semblance of an excuse for abruptly terminating his visit. But when he had made his way out into the park, and had considered the circumstances of his recent encounter with Shepston, a new aspect of the problem was presented to him.

He was intrigued by the possibility that Shepston had already connected that infernal paragraph with the presence of the Strattons' Canadian visitor. The display of the journal in the hall, followed by his well timed return, might conceivably have been a trap. The thing

was by no means unlikely. Possibly Shepston concealed a romantic imagination behind that perfunctorily smiling mask—he had that morning proclaimed his "dishonesty"—and he might have leapt to a conclusion which was amazingly justified in the central fact, although it was as certainly false in its association of the paragraph with Grey's presence in the house at that moment. Or—and in considering this alternative Grey unconsciously displayed the romanticism he had just attributed to Shepston—it was possible that the Strattons had private and influential sources of information. The report of Lord Downham's annoyance might have been a rather clever piece of diplomacy.

Grey conceived a horrible picture of the Stratton family, in full possession of the facts of his birth, deliberately inviting him to Stratton in order that they might test him and pass judgment upon him. They might have thought it worth while to determine whether he was the sort of man they might be able to bribe?

He clenched his hands and unconsciously quickened his walk. He saw no way to test that last repulsive hypothesis by any examination of the attitude the family had so far displayed towards him. He did not know these

people. They were a strange type, with different manners and different ways of thought and speech from the people he had known. It seemed quite conceivable that they had been playing with him, drawing him on. It was even possible that they had been responsible for the insertion of that cursed paragraph! They would have influence enough, no doubt, for such a thing as that. Indeed, who else could have done it? The theory seemed to cover all the facts, to explain the invitation to Devonshire, and their manner toward him. He had superficially criticised them as shallow and unintelligent, when he should have known that in their own way they were astonishingly clever.

And if he had, indeed, been tricked and duped, what was he immediately to do? For a few weak moments he contemplated the thought of instant flight, but he put that away from him. No, whatever happened now, he must see this situation through, arrive at some definite understanding. He must return to the house prepared, temporarily at least, to act a part, to pretend that that newspaper announcement had had no possible interest for him. He was as alert now as hitherto he had been stupidly blind; he would be in a position to

watch these people and to draw inferences from their speech and their general behaviour toward him. And if he had reason to believe that his theory was true, he would not hesitate to tell them the whole truth, to proclaim his contempt for wealth and position.

The thought of such an avowal was insidiously appealing. His standpoint would be so magnificently assured; none could deny his sincerity in such unprecedented circumstances. Not that he saw the scene as in any sense theatrical, or even dramatic; but only as a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate his theory of life and Society. Even the Strattons would be forced to listen to him then.

He looked at his watch and found that it was nearly half-past one. As he returned to the house he had a new sense of confidence. Even if they knew, he could soon convince them that he had done nothing of which he or anyone could be ashamed.

2

Grey was reassured upon one point long before lunch was finished. Shepston had spoken the truth when he had said that Lord Downham was annoyed.

In the first ten minutes no reference of any kind was made to the possible claimant, and then Lady Adelaide unwisely opened the topic by saying:

"What's this new canard about a claimant, Richard?"

Grey looked across at Shepston and saw a distinct shade of annoyance cross his usually placid face.

"Just a canard," he said curtly.

Lord Downham frowned, cleared his throat as if he were about to deliver an address, made a vague gesture with his right hand, and said:

"Ridiculous nonsense."

Lady Downham snatched at so tempting an opportunity to elaborate the obvious.

"They always do find something of the kind in August," she remarked cheerfully; "and, really, people must be getting a little tired of sea-serpents. I've never quite understood why newspapers want to print sensational things of this sort, particularly when they aren't true; but I suppose there must be an excellent reason, or they wouldn't do it."

"That can't be the reason in this case," snapped Lady Adelaide. "The whole thing isn't more than that." She illustrated the

approximate size of the paragraph with a finger and thumb that almost touched. "When they begin a silly season topic they do it on the grand scale," she added conclusively.

"Perhaps some of the evening papers will take it up," put in Tempe.

"Make it look a bit queer for us if there *was* a fellow from Canada——" began Stratton, but his father interrupted him with an explosive "Pooh!"

Stratton blinked.

"I mean I don't see why——" he tried again.

"Preposterous nonsense!" exclaimed Lord Downham, throwing his head back. "I—I don't care to have the thing discussed. Poor Edward was not at all the kind of man to—to marry a woman in Canada and say nothing about it. Not at all the kind of man. He had certain failings, but he wasn't vicious; not at all vicious."

"I suppose it would have been rather vicious to have done that," said Tempe demurely.

"Quite beside the point in any case," was her father's reply. "The—what we have to consider is—er—chiefly—that it is hardly likely

after thirty-four years—that a man—that any claim should be made after so long an interval."

"Might have only just found out, of course," suggested Stratton.

"I can't agree with you," his father said.

Tempe raised her eyebrows. "He might have met that tutor person—what was his name—Hayles, or something?—by accident," she said. "Tremendously romantic meeting it would have been, wouldn't it?"

"Not romantic for you, my dear Tempe," Shepston remarked.

"I don't know," she returned. "It would give us something to talk about for a time."

Lord Downham looked across at his daughter with every sign of displeasure. "I have said, Tempe, that I do not care to have the thing discussed," he said.

"But, my dear Richard," remonstrated Lady Adelaide, "that looks as if we were afraid there might be some truth in it."

"There cannot possibly be a grain of truth in it," Lord Downham replied irritably.

And then Shepston intervened by saying:

"Stratton has always been a cockshy for the *Daily Post*. They've still got their knife into us over Downham's speech on the Small Hold-

ings Bill. No doubt this is another step in their pin-prick policy. Nothing more than a political significance in it. However, if you are all so interested in politics, I can trace the *Post's* campaign for you. It began, as I said, over the Small Holdings Bill, and properly to understand it you ought to have some idea of the principles that were at stake——"

"Uncle Reggie, dear, chuck it!" interrupted Tempe.

"But you can't understand this morning's paragraph if you don't know the history that lies behind it," Shepston said.

Lord Downham nodded his silent approval and murmured something inaudible—a trick of his in the House that was always faithfully reported.

Tempe sighed. "We'll take it as said," she conceded.

"And talk of something else," suggested her uncle.

"But you really think that that is the explanation, Reggie?" asked Lady Downham, with obvious relief.

"Perfectly certain," her brother said, with every appearance of satisfied conviction.

None of them had taken the least notice of

Grey during this conversation. He had listened attentively, but the only inference he could draw was the comforting one that they all seemed to regard him as being unconcerned in what was essentially a family topic. He was convinced that none of them was acting a part, unless it were Shepston. Shepston was still doubtful. Why, for instance, had he permitted the subject to be discussed—a subject plainly very distasteful to Lord Downham—when that ingenious explanation of a journalistic policy might have been advanced so much earlier? But on the whole Grey was relieved. He saw that that nightmare of his in the park had been a monstrous conception, and if it had not been for his one remaining doubt he would have proceeded to carry out his earlier plan to manufacture some excuse for leaving Stratton the next day. The thought of Shepston's possible suspicion still intervened. If that suspicion existed it must be allayed; and Grey realised very clearly that his sudden departure would probably be read in its true significance, although in that case, also, his motive would surely be misread. Shepston would imagine that the claimant, having made all the investigations he desired under the guise of friendship,

was returning to town to prosecute his case—an intolerable imputation.

Grey decided that before he escaped from the unhappy situation into which he had so innocently fallen he must find a means of sounding Shepston.

3

An opportunity offered immediately.

After lunch Stratton insisted on golf, Tempe immediately volunteered, and then her uncle suggested that he, too, was willing to play. A foursome was the obvious arrangement, and was readily accepted by all but Stratton, who complained that a foursome was "a rotten game." That objection, however, was ruled out by the majority, and Grey noted that Stratton gave way gracefully enough. He appeared to be an amiable youth, Grey thought, quite unlike some of the spoilt sons of millionaires he had encountered in the States.

The question of partners in the game was decided by a consideration of handicaps—Grey was plainly advanced in Stratton's opinion by an admission of "five."

"You're on the limit mark, then," Stratton

said. "I'm nine, Tempe counts as sixteen, and Reggie's anything up to twenty-five. You'd better play with him, and Tempe and I will give you a stroke at the third, the eleventh, the fourteenth, and the seventeenth. It ought to be a snip for you, because the course is so short—bogey's only sixty-one; but Reggie's always liable to give any hole away. I've known him take seven at the eighth."

"The eighth, it should be explained," put in Shepston genially, "is a hundred and five yards from tee to hole. I could do it in a certain four if Dickie would let me use a putter throughout and play round the rhododendrons; but he insists on my lofting over them, and simply anything may happen when you are well into a rhododendron."

"It mayn't," returned Stratton, "because we count it out of bounds to save the bushes. You only lose a stroke and distance."

"And confidence," Shepston added. "I believe on that historic occasion you mentioned, Dickie, I successfully lofted three consecutive balls into the same bush before you condescended to let me play round with a putter."

"We didn't let you; we made you," Tempe said.

"Unworthy of you to spoil a story for the sake of historical fact," commented her uncle. "If you're going to develop a talent in that direction I shall add you to my list of persons better avoided."

Grey was glad to find that Shepston was so evidently in a genial mood.

"I wonder if that's a very long list of yours?" he said.

"It grows," Shepston replied, with a touch of bitterness.

For the first two holes the party kept together. Shepston was playing, as he admitted, above his form, and he and his partner won the first hole and halved the second. But when they came to the comparatively long third Shepston sliced his brassie shot right off the line into long grass under the trees, and Grey seized the opportunity to open the topic he wanted to discuss. He had carefully considered his opening, and believed that he had hit upon an approach that would not betray his personal interest.

"Is that true that you said at lunch?" he began, as he and Shepston diverged from the other pair to find the sliced ball. "I mean that an English journal like the *Daily Post* would

deliberately carry a policy of pin-pricks to such a length as to insert a paragraph like the one you mentioned to me this morning? I had no idea that your British papers would do a thing like that. In America, of course——" He left his analogy unfinished for fear of obscuring the point of his question.

"Would it disappoint you to find that the English Press was as corrupt as the American?" asked Shepston guilelessly.

"Why, no. I can't say that I should be disappointed," Grey said. "I just wanted to know."

"Like Clenham—in 'Little Dorrit,' you remember?"

"Am I to understand then, that you represent the Circumlocution Office?" returned Grey.

Shepston laughed pleasantly. "Oh! I think not," he said. "No, certainly not this afternoon. I'm taking a holiday. No doubt you think I'm another of the idle rich, but really I work uncommonly hard for a living. The Shepstons are a poverty-stricken family, and I'm one of the first of 'em to earn my own bread and butter. Surely that's our ball? No, it's a button mushroom come up after the rain."

Grey wondered if this was merely light-hearted prattle or if it represented a deliberate avoidance of his question. He decided to make another attempt.

"And my inquiry about the honesty of the British Press came too near work for a holiday afternoon?" he asked.

"Not at all," Shepston said. "You'll find that as a mine of information I'm quite willing to be worked. It's always so inspiriting to display one's knowledge. But about the *Daily Post*. I should say that the editor was quite a reasonably honest, peer-respecting man. He is one of those nice Liberals, you know, with a strong sense of public decency."

"It seems to me, then, that you libelled him rather badly at lunch-time," suggested Grey.

"I confessed to dishonesty this morning," Shepston said. "Justifiable dishonesty in this case. My brother-in-law would have broken his finger-bowl in another minute if I hadn't interfered. He loses his temper badly at times. I fancy Dickie is shouting to us. Would it be criminal, do you think, to drop another ball and play it?"

But Grey had already seen their ball and

had temporarily concealed the discovery for his own purposes. He played a very nice iron shot out of the rough, despite the fact that his mind was occupied with the reflection that so far his object was no nearer attainment.

He was aware of a certain pleasure in matching his wits against those of his assumed antagonist, and as the game progressed, and he had opportunity to consider his position, he realised very plainly that for the present he must make no further attempt to lead the conversation towards the point at issue. It was possible that Shepston had been deliberately elusive in order to draw him on, to discover whether he would display a suspicious eagerness to discuss the matter of that paragraph. So far, Grey congratulated himself, he had not given himself away. His curiosity with regard to the morals of the English Press could not be certainly interpreted as evidence of a desire to discuss the topic of a claimant to the Stratton title and estates.

But the more he came to consider the conversation during the perfunctory search for that lost ball the more convinced was he that Shepston was on the *qui vive*. If he had genuinely wished to avoid the topic he would have main-

tained the explanation he had given over the luncheon table. Instead of that he had deliberately made an opening for Grey to press his inquiry.

By the time they had come to the seventh green Grey had decided he would initiate no further reference as yet to the subject of the claimant. He, too, would play a waiting game and try to induce an attack from his opponent. Meanwhile, whether owing to his preoccupation or to the play of his partner, the game was going against them, and he set himself to make up lost ground.

Shepston had the "honour" at his old trap, the eighth tee.

"Shall I go out for it or play round?" he asked, looking at his partner.

Grey made a pretence of surveying the hazard. "I don't know," he said; "it seems to me that your talents lie rather in the direction of playing round."

"Of circumlocution, eh?" replied Shepston. "You misjudge me, Grey. I have also my moments of inspiration." He addressed his ball and lofted a very creditable shot over the rhododendrons.

And when they had walked round to the

green Shepston's ball was found on the lip of the hole.

He affected an inordinate glee.

"On my day," he said, "I'm simply unbeatable."

Grey wondered whether, when the right moment arrived, Shepston might not also "go out" for himself? The prospect did not daunt him.

The eighth hole proved to be the turning point of the match. Grey was playing well enough to earn the admiration of Stratton, who showed no sign of chagrin when he and his partner were handsomely beaten. Shepston had suddenly exhibited a quite remarkable brilliancy.

Tempe commented on her uncle's achievement by a remark that gave Grey a curious little piece of information.

"You must have been working out a very difficult problem to play a shot like that," she remarked when Shepston had run down a seven-foot putt on the thirteenth green.

Grey was standing at her elbow. "What's the reference for that paradox?" he asked.

"Oh! he always says that the only time he can play golf decently is when he's thinking of something else," she said.

Shepston had taken out his eye-glass—this was the first time that Grey had seen him without it—and was polishing it with his handkerchief.

"One of the tarradiddles that amuse the children," he explained; but it occurred to Grey that for once Shepston appeared slightly confused.

4

One thing was certain, namely, that the family of Stratton, whether by mutual agreement or by some tacit understanding, had decided to make no further open reference to the subject of the claimant. Lord Downham did not put in an appearance at tea, but despite the absence of the restraint his presence implied, no one approached the topic which might fairly be inferred to have been the dominant interest. Had not Tempe said at lunch that the claim would give them something to talk about? Moreover, it seemed that on more than one occasion the thing was in the minds of both Lady Downham and Lady Adelaide, and that they avoided it by a deliberate effort. Lady Downham, more particularly, displayed a

tendency to drift into family history, and to pull herself up abruptly by plunging quite inappropriately into Socialism, the one subject which she seemed to imagine would unfailingly interest her visitor.

Shepston spoke only of his own achievements on the links that afternoon, protesting that his handicap must be reduced by Dickie.

Stratton agreed. "I shall put you at eighteen for the next foursome," he said, "and you'll have to give Tempe and me a stroke."

Grey was wondering whether they would sit on chattering in the small drawing-room until it was time to dress, when Tempe jumped up and said that he had not seen the ruins. "We've just time now," she went on. "I'll act as cicerone."

Grey expressed his readiness, and as no one offered to accompany them, they set off alone. Last night he had planned a solitary expedition to the old home of the Strattons, but he no longer had the least desire to encourage any sentimental emotions. In some curious way that unfortunate announcement in the *Daily Post* had put him in a false position. He felt that he was no longer a free agent; he was on the defensive, and the time might be at hand when

he would be obliged to offer a full explanation of his intentions and motives. He could not avoid the suggestion that he had been foolish in the first instance to accept the invitation to Stratton. His presence there might so easily be mistaken in certain circumstances as evidence of an intention to spy out the land.

When he agreed to the proposal to inspect the ruins of the old Hall, he was prepared for an hour's light, even frivolous, conversation. Lady Tempe had appeared to be in a relatively serious mood on the previous evening, but he remembered that the essential of her advice to him then had been to avoid seriousness; and with that advice in mind he was determined to meet her supposed wishes.

"Have you any more advice for me this afternoon?" he began. "And have I profited at all by that issued on the terrace last night? I'm such a beginner that I'm not at all sure that I got your orders correctly."

She looked at him with a touch of impatience. "You didn't," she said.

Her tone was curt enough to make him pause. He could not be sure that she was not positively offended for some unknown reason.

"Well, how's that?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I prefer you ponderous, after all," she said.

"Does that mean that you've changed your mind, Lady Tempe," he said, "or that my altered mood didn't suit you?"

"Too much mood about it," she replied.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you," he said.

"Why should you follow me or anyone else?"

He thought over that for a moment. "You certainly gave me clear instructions last night," he urged more seriously; "and I don't see that I could have done better than try to carry them out."

"You misread them," she told him.

"Well, can't you show me where I went wrong?" he asked.

"No, I don't know that I can," she said.

For a minute or two they walked on in silence. Tempe had taken the short cut to the old Hall, past the long range of glass-houses, and through the kitchen gardens. Grey was embarrassed by the presence of the men who were working in their neighbourhood — they passed at least half a dozen before they finally made their way through a door in the high brick

wall that shut off the park lands on that side. He was piqued by his companion's tone and anxious to assert himself. On the terrace he had been quite willing to listen to her advice, but now he felt that he had a right to some explanation.

"Well, I don't know that it's of any importance one way or the other," he said when they were clear of the kitchen gardens. "I don't imagine that I'm likely to make any permanent alteration in my manners."

"I was afraid you *were* considering it," she returned.

"I think I'm beginning to follow you now," he said. "Do you imply, Lady Tempe, that I have been trying to put on manners that didn't suit me?"

"Well, haven't you?"

"I guess I have," he admitted.

"Why do you?"

He stumbled over his answer. He was very conscious that the fault did not wholly lie with him. If he had not been so hampered by that secret knowledge of his he could have been more natural.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't seem to be able to meet you all on open ground. I

can't expect you to agree with my opinions. I'm forced to play some sort of part."

"You aren't," she said. "We don't. We're perfectly honest."

"But you've got the whip hand," he protested. "You are above criticism, or you believe you are——"

Her laugh interrupted him. "That's better," she said.

It occurred to him suddenly that she was displaying a most flattering interest in his personality.

"It's very kind of you to take so much trouble over me," he said.

She gave him a whimsical smile. "What bosh we are talking!" she said.

"I was taking it quite seriously," Grey said; and went on with an earnestness that overrode her attempt to elude his gravity, "and I know that, so far as you can be, you were serious, too, just now and last night as well."

She opened her eyes wide with an affectation of offended surprise. "As far as I can be," she repeated.

"Well, I may be doing you an injustice in that," he said, still with the same earnestness.

"I haven't had time to judge. But it seems to me that you are all suffering from the want of some reasonable purpose in life. You've been honest with me, and given me to understand that you don't care to see me fooling around and trying to play the game you'd expect from your ordinary acquaintances, and I'm glad you said what you did; it was mainly true, though there was another reason for it, too, that I can't speak about just now."

"I love mysteries," commented Tempe.

He decided to ignore that remark. "Well, I've taken your hints as a sign of friendship," he continued, "and I'd like to return the compliment."

"But if we think we're above criticism?" Tempe quoted.

"*You* are young enough to learn," he said severely.

They had reached the ruins now, and it seemed that she was going to cut short the discussion by taking up the rôle of cicerone.

"This is a bit of the old gateway," she began. "It's Elizabethan, isn't it? Uncle Reggie has told me all about it, but I've forgotten."

"I think it would be kinder if you'd just

say right out that it's not my business to preach to you," Grey said.

"Bother the man," replied Tempe. "What is it you want to say?"

"It's no concern of mine, I know," he said, "but it hurts me to think that you should waste your life. I was thinking it over last night."

She lifted herself up and sat down upon a tall "mounting" stone that stood just outside the gateway.

"I'm immensely flattered, of course," she said, "that you should find me worthy of such consideration."

He met her smile with another that was a little grim.

"I don't know yet that you are," he said.

"And you want to find out?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, we've had the text; now for the sermon," she said. "Do you prefer to stand when you're preaching?"

"We'd be more on a level," he remarked; and leaned against the jamb of the gateway.

Tempe demurely folded her hands in her lap and looked down at them. She had wonderful eyelashes, thick, black, and long, and for

the first time it crossed Grey's mind that she might be flirting with him. He found the idea curiously distasteful.

"Haven't you any ambitions to live?" he asked curtly. "The life you lead isn't living; it's trying to keep amused. And that will go on getting harder as you grow older."

"I may marry," she put in.

"Sure," he said. "But will that help? You'll have two or three children, and then stop because it's too much trouble; and after that you'll get back to the old game of finding fresh amusement."

"But what's the alternative?" she asked.

"Struggle! Fighting to achieve something. It doesn't matter a heap what, but it must be big enough to take all your energy."

She looked up at him thoughtfully. "All very well for a man," she commented, "but a woman doesn't get the chance to do things big enough to take all her energy."

"I can tell you about one who did," he said.

"Who was that? Joan of Arc?"

"No; my mother. She worked for thirty years to give me an education. She was near starvation once or twice, and until I was a

grown man she had a terrible struggle. She'd been an hotel clerk before she married, and for fifteen years she used to depend on odd jobs in hotels. You see, she wouldn't live in because of me. She used to teach me herself when she had a minute to spare, and I learnt more from her than I ever learnt either at school or college."

"What happened to your father?"

"He was a skunk. He deserted my mother a few weeks after he'd married her."

"And she never saw him again?"

"No. She wouldn't have ever set eyes on him again anyway; she hated the sound of his name, and she taught me to hate it, too, in a different way. But he went back to England, and died there a year or two later. He was one of the idle rich; one of the sort of people that make a fetish of amusement. He——" Grey stopped, suddenly aware that he was most unwisely advertising his family history.

Lady Tempe had been listening to his story with absorbed attention. "And I suppose your mother taught you to be a Socialist?" she asked.

"She taught me to work and to recognise injustice when I saw it," he said.

"And you mean to go on working all your life?"

"I certainly do."

"Suppose you made money? Got fairly rich?"

"I wouldn't keep rich. Just now I'm living on an income of three thousand dollars a year, and I'll be getting more from royalties on my book. Well, I reckon that's too much. I'm keeping it for the present, because I've got to finish my education. There are some things I want to understand out here in Europe before I go back to America. But in a year or two I'm going to use the capital of that money."

"How?" she asked.

"I'm not sure yet," he said. "That's one of the things I've got to learn. But I know one thing about it for certain, and that is that I'm going to work as hard in getting rid of that money as my mother worked in saving it. I'm not going to give it to any cause, not even Socialist propaganda; I'm going to be my own propagandist, and I hope to die poor."

He had no foolish hesitation in talking about his plans. He was thinking greatly of his work and the ends he meant to further, and not at all of how his conduct might appear in the eyes

of his listener, and it came as a shock to him when she said:

"You are very self-sacrificing!"

There was a touch of banter in her tone that hurt him.

"Does it seem that way to you?" he asked. "I suppose it would. You're judging me by your own standards. Now, it doesn't seem to me that I'm self-sacrificing at all. I'd just hate as much to be rich as you'd hate to be poor."

"You don't know that I should hate to be poor," she returned. "You don't know anything whatever about me." She was looking at him quietly and steadily, and he thought she was the loveliest woman he had ever seen. She was grave now, and he saw not the beautiful spoilt child of her environment, but a woman full of immense potentialities for emotion and self-sacrifice.

"No," he said. "That's quite true; I don't."

She looked down at the white, slender little hands crossed in her lap, and then held them up for him to see.

"For years and years I've spent at least an hour every day on those," she said.

"I can easily believe it," he returned.

"Don't you think it was an awful waste of time?"

"In a way, yes," he prevaricated.

"Only in a way?"

He hesitated on the verge of an obvious compliment, and then said, "From my point of view it was a waste of time."

"And I often spend another hour or more on having my hair done," she continued, "and even then we haven't begun to consider the really important function of dressing."

"That's one of the ways you find amusement, I suppose?" he suggested.

She shook her head. "That's one of the things you don't begin to understand," she said. "It isn't an amusement; it's a dreadful bore. I hate the process, but I love the result. It's one of the satisfactions of my life. It gives me the same sense of power that you get, perhaps, from writing a book. To be——" She hesitated, and then, with a frank smile, said, "To be like this—not to look like this, you know, but to *be* like this—is part of what I live and work for. And I have to work for it."

"Only a part?" he put in.

"You think all the rest is merely to find amusement?"

"I'm waiting for you to tell me."

"I suppose you would be immensely surprised if I told you that sometimes I have thought of going into a convent?"

"For religious reasons?"

Her denial of that was emphatic.

"For a new experience?" he tried.

She shook her head again. "No," she said, "to satisfy something in me that I don't understand myself." She leaned a little forward, gripping the edge of the stone on which she sat with those delicate, strong white hands of hers. "And I've had to fight against it," she went on, looking past him at the pitted, grey stonework of the gateway, "just as I am going to fight against your ideas. I won't allow myself to think about them in a certain way because I'm afraid of believing in them. *And I don't want to.*"

They were both silent for a few moments, and then Grey said, "You needn't be afraid. You'll never believe anything you don't want to believe."

"That's isn't a bit true," she returned; and before he could answer she let herself easily

down from her stone seat and went on, "and already you seem to have forgotten the most important thing I've told you, that it takes me at least an hour to dress, even when it's only for my own family and for an idealist who thinks that the better dressed I am the idler I must be. That sounds like a quotation. How do you like the ruins? I shall cross-examine you at dinner on the tracery in the chapel windows. I'm going to run."

He did not follow her as she raced away from him, but as he watched her disappear he had a sudden sense of great loss. He felt strangely alone, as if in one instant he had been snatched up from all the warmth and joy of human contact and had been set down in some remote, desolate universe, eternally separated from the joys of life. He had seen new landscapes, and the thought of his work and the purpose he had so enthusiastically enunciated a few minutes before wore an unfamiliar aspect of bleakness and futility. How little he could do, and how little was he able to judge whether his work was, after all, the right work! He had only known one side.

As he made his way slowly back to the house he was reflecting that in a day or two at

longest he must leave Stratton, and that he would in all probability never again see the place or any of its people.

5

Lady Tempe did not fulfil her threat to embarrass him by discussing at dinner the tracery of the chapel windows; on the contrary, she saved him from confusion by deflecting her mother's questions.

"You hardly had time to do the ruins properly," Lady Downham began with the soup. "You must go again; but I hope you saw the buttery—that's the really old part——"

"Was a buttery a kind of early dairy?" interposed Tempe innocently.

Grey jumped at the opportunity to avoid explanations which he had a marked disinclination to give. He had gone to see the old Hall, and he had spent all his time in a particularly intimate conversation with Lady Tempe; and in some way the fact had become a secret that they delightfully shared. He wanted now to preserve it.

"Why, no!" he said eagerly. "It had nothing to do with butter. It was the place

where they kept the wine and beer. The word derives from the same source as 'butts' and 'bottles.'"

"Great idea!" put in Stratton. "I always wondered why it was called a buttery at Trinity."

"They must have drunk a tremendous lot in those days," commented Lady Tempe, to save a pause that might give her mother another opening.

"I suppose they brewed their own ale once a year," suggested Grey; and for a time the conversation strayed about the life of the Middle Ages. Even Lord Downham came in with an occasional remark.

And they were well on into dinner before a quiet interval gave Lady Downham another chance to renew what she evidently thought was a safe and interesting topic.

"Did you settle the problem of the leper window?" she asked hopefully, as if she trusted that this puzzling question would be definitely answered at last.

"I'm afraid not," Grey hazarded; and looked to his confederate for assistance.

"I didn't show him that," she said. "I'm so tired of that endless discussion. And surely

that old archæologist we had settled it by saying that it was a sort of conventional leper window, shoved in because it was the proper thing to have."

"I wasn't satisfied with that explanation," Lady Downham said. "I should like to have Mr. Grey's opinion. I suppose you really are something of an authority?" she added, turning to her visitor.

"Indeed I'm not," he protested. "I have read something about English mediæval architecture, but one can't learn very much without studying examples."

"You hadn't much time for that?" Lady Downham assumed.

"Well, I've had no opportunity," Grey explained.

Lady Downham gave that a moment's thought, and then light dawned upon her, and she said, "I always forget that you haven't any Gothic remains in America." Her tone seemed to imply that a country without Gothic remains was not worth remembering. "You ought really to spend a whole day at the Hall," she concluded. "You should get Reggie to take you."

Grey bowed and hoped for a change of sub-

ject, but he was conscious of a boyish exultation in the fact that he was sharing his disgrace with Lady Tempe. Looking up, he saw an attentive and rather quizzical eye regarding him from behind Shepston's monocle.

"I should very much like to hear your account of the ruins," Grey said.

"Tempe's really quite as efficient on her day," Shepston replied, and his thin tenor voice seemed to gather in the attention of the whole table. "Obviously she was not in the mood this evening."

"We were studying the gateway chiefly," Tempe put in.

"A fine piece of Tudor work," corroborated Grey. That was the single piece of information he had been given, and he recalled the manner in which it had been imparted, and wondered why Lady Tempe had not wanted to expound the place to him. Her uncle had certainly implied that she was capable of doing it, and yet she had said carelessly, "Elizabethan, isn't it?" as if she had no kind of interest in a knowledge of the old Hall.

"Early sixteenth century," said Lord Downham, with the air of one glad to be on safe ground; and Grey was thankful that by

saying Tudor he had been saved from admitting ignorance of the one item to which he had inferentially given an hour's study.

After that the topic of the old Hall was mercifully dropped, and later, while they were having coffee on the terrace, Tempe whispered her congratulations.

"Clever of you to say Tudor," she said.

"Pure luck," returned Grey; and then, in the same confidential tone, he said, "But why, if you know the place so well, did you say Elizabethan?"

"Freakishness," she replied. "I've got to play auction to-night. Father's got some business or something to attend to."

And again Grey found an inexplicable pleasure in the suggestion that he and this girl were playing on the same side.

"That's a nuisance," he said, completing the confidence.

"You'd better play billiards with Dickie," she advised him.

He realised with a regret he did not pause to analyse that he would have preferred to watch the bridge-players.

6

STRATTON had gone upstairs to supervise the brushing of the table, and Grey was standing by the card-table watching the cut for partners, when Garton came into the room and announced: "Mr. Fellowes called to see you, sir."

Grey, watching the table, thought the announcement was addressed to Shepston, until Shepston looked up and said, "For you, I think, Grey."

"Yes, sir, for Mr. Grey," corroborated Garton.

"For me?" repeated Grey, and instinctively his mind leapt to the thought of an interviewer. "What did you say his name was?" he asked.

"Mr. Fellowes, sir," Garton said. "An American, I believe, sir." Garton had had experience of American tourists.

"I'll come," Grey said. He was afraid to ask for any further particulars. He had a dreadful intuition that this mysterious visitor had some connection with that amazing paragraph in the *Daily Post*. And he was conscious that Shepston, blandly smiling with an air of

friendly, almost concerned, interest, was alert and inquisitive behind that wonderfully effective mask of his.

Garton led the way to that well of a room in which Shepston had received his visitor last night.

Mr. Fellowes was standing on the hearth-rug. He was a tall, heavily-made man, with thick, black eyebrows and a clean-shaven, fleshy face. Grey remembered him instantly as a particularly able and, as report had it, a particularly unscrupulous member of the New York Press. They had only met on one occasion, and then Mr. Fellowes had published an inaccurate and faintly satirical account of Grey's views on Socialism.

He had, however, apparently no uneasiness on the score of that former meeting. He came forward with a fine assumption of cordiality and held out his hand.

"You'll hardly remember me, Mr. Grey," he said.

Grey took the hand that was offered to him and shook it without warmth. "I'd forgotten your name for the moment," he said, "but I remember you now very well, and your article in the *Sunday Sun*."

"You mustn't blame me for that, Mr. Grey," replied Fellowes. "My editor just took my stuff and made pie of it. I meant to write you about it and apologise, but I was considerably hustled about that time, and I let it go."

Grey nodded and dismissed the subject. "Won't you sit down?" he said; but he did not invite his visitor to remove the light overcoat that he was wearing over his evening dress.

"A remarkable place this," Fellowes began, when he had sat down. "I walked up from the village, through the park, and got some kind of a view of it. The Marquis of Downham seems to be better thought of than King George down here."

Grey ignored this conversational opening. "Why did you want to see me?" he asked.

"Why, I'll tell you right away," Fellowes said; and, instead of keeping his word, plunged into an account of how he had come over to Europe for a holiday. This was his fourth visit, he said, and on each of his earlier vacations he had been lucky enough to make a "scoop" that had more than paid his expenses. He spoke in a familiar, confiding tone, as if he were quite

certain that his listener must be sympathetically interested.

Grey listened without attempting an interruption. He had little doubt now as to the purpose of this visit, but he wanted certain information and a little time to consider his own defence.

"I can't see how this interests me," he said when Fellowes paused.

"I guess you haven't seen the *Daily Post* this morning," replied Fellowes, "or maybe you read it hurriedly."

He put his hand inside the breast of his overcoat, produced a pocket-book, and then passed a news-cutting over to Grey, who read it carelessly and returned it.

"I had heard of that paragraph," he said; "it was discussed at lunch to-day, but I can't see that it has anything to do with me."

Mr. Fellowes' smile said quite plainly: "I'll allow that you're cute, but I've got the goods."

"Gee!" he remarked quietly. "The family are considerable flustered, I guess," he added.

"Not in the least," replied Grey. "I gather that they've heard of that stunt before."

"It's a sure thing this time," Fellowes said, still with that admiring but half-expostulatory smile.

Grey frowned. "I'm sorry to be rude, Mr. Fellowes," he said, getting up, "but Lord Stratton is waiting for me, and as I can't get you to say what your business is with me, I'm afraid I must go. When I get back to town, perhaps——"

Mr. Fellowes appeared to be deeply hurt. "Now, why can't you trust me?" he said. "I'm willing to help you and to lie low till you give me the right word——"

"What the hell about?" snapped Grey.

Fellowes' shrug of the shoulders implied that his companion was overacting his innocence.

Grey turned to the door. "I'll send the butler to show you out," he said over his shoulder. He had grasped the handle before Fellowes admitted that the bluff had succeeded.

"One minute, Mr. Grey," he said; and Grey turned with his hand still on the door-knob.

"Is it anyway possible that you don't know that all this place belongs to you?" Fellowes asked.

Grey quoted the remark made by Lord Downham at lunch. "Ridiculous nonsense!" he said.

Fellowes was not deceived, and apparently decided that the time had come to try a new line. "I was very willing to chat with you in a friendly way about this," he said, "but if you won't give me your confidence I'll carry the thing through my own way."

"Is that a threat?" asked Grey.

"Why, no, sir; it's sure not," Fellowes replied. "I've gotten the whole story complete from A to Z, and I'm ready to publish any day; but naturally I thought I'd like to discuss it with you first, just to see what you thought about it."

Grey saw that he was in a tight corner, but he attempted one more bluff before he showed his hand.

"I wish you could be more explicit," he said. "What, in God's name, is this story of yours and where did you get it from?"

"There's a man living in Toronto of the name of William Hayles, sir," Fellowes said, "and he's going into politics in his old age. Well, he wanted my help, and I gave it him willingly enough, and his sense of gratitude

warmed him up to giving me a chance of making the price of a trip to Europe. He gave me the details, and I have since corroborated them."

It was not a story that did credit to Fellowes' journalistic ability. Grey did not believe for one instant that the reason for Hayles' betrayal of that old secret had been one of gratitude—it might far more probably have been some kind of political blackmail. But the authority was good, and although Grey attempted one more denial, he knew that the facts of his birth were known, however uncertain the evidence.

"I know nothing about any William Hayles," he said.

"Oh, well, it won't make any difference to me," Fellowes replied. "I'm glad to have seen the place, anyhow. I'll wish you good-night, Mr. Grey."

It was evident that he held the cards. He had come there no doubt to find out if Grey himself knew the truth concerning his own inheritance; but even without that knowledge Fellowes could make capital out of the story he had.

They had both been standing for the last

five minutes, but now Grey sat down and pointed to a chair opposite to him. "This story must not be published," he said.

"How's that?" asked Fellowes.

"Because I have not nor ever have had the least intention of making the claim."

Fellowes accepted the admission without comment.

"Staying here just by chance, I guess?" he said.

"No. I wanted to see the place. I wanted to know the family," replied Grey. "But I neither wish to possess the one nor to oust the other. I've known the whole story for ten years, and if I had felt the least inclination to make any claim I should have done it long before this."

"But do you mean to say——" began Fellowes.

"I do mean just that. Nothing would ever induce me to become a claimant for this title and these estates." Grey's voice rang with a note of conviction that could in no wise be mistaken.

"Well, you've got me whipped to a frazzle," remarked Fellowes. He paused for a moment, opened his mouth to speak as if his

thoughts had induced another doubt, and then, looking at Arthur Grey's determined face, he gently repeated, "whipped to a frazzle."

"I should deny the whole story," Grey said firmly.

Fellowes' expression suddenly changed. He stood up and held out his hand. "Grip," he said. "I'm proud to meet a man, for the first time in my newspaper experience, who was ready to stick to his principles in face of a temptation like this."

Grey shook hands, more warmly this time. "I'm sorry to spoil your coup, Mr. Fellowes," he said; "but you'll allow that your story doesn't go without my agreement."

"Why, no. How could it?" Fellowes admitted. "Well, I'm down and out over this, but I'll get another scoop before I go back, though it won't touch this one."

Grey went out with him to the portico, and shook hands with him again on the terrace.

"Are you staying down here?" he asked.

Fellowes shook his head. "No; I'll get back first thing to-morrow," he said. "I've nothing more to do here."

7

As Grey came back into the hall he became aware that the interview had shaken him more than he could have thought possible. He had won, apparently, but his nerves were still trembling. And he could find no reason to account for such perturbation. After all, he had nothing at stake. If the story came out he would lose the good opinion of the Strattons, no doubt; but what was their opinion to him?

As he made his way back to the drawing-room he tried to put the whole affair out of his thoughts.

He found the bridge-table broken up, Shepston gone, and the three ladies gathered together about an evening paper.

They looked up as he came in, and Lady Adelaide said:

"The scandal grows."

"How?" asked Grey.

"There's a leader about the claimant to Stratton in the *Evening Mail*," Tempe replied, "with—oh! all kinds of hints and a lot about Tichborne."

For a moment Grey almost lost his self-

possession. He had an immense desire to fly from the room and from the house. And when he spoke, his voice sounded to himself forced and unnatural.

"Do they mention the name of the claimant?" he was saying.

Tempe shook her head. "They are being very guarded at present," she said, "but they promise particulars very soon; and poor father is dreadfully upset. Uncle Reggie has gone to comfort and reassure him."

"Really very annoying, you know," remarked Lady Downham.

Lady Adelaide appeared to be thoroughly enjoying herself.

"There isn't a grain of truth in it, of course," Grey said.

"We don't know that there mayn't be," Tempe replied. She was looking at Grey with a curiously intent stare.

"There isn't," he said. "I feel perfectly sure that the whole thing's a newspaper scandal. We—we are so used to that sort of thing in America."

Tempe was still watching him. "And who was your mysterious visitor?" she asked suddenly.

"A journalist," Grey said; "a man named Fellowes. I had met him in America. He wanted me to contribute to a—a scare, something like this."

"And are you going to?" asked Tempe, with a touch of eagerness.

"Most certainly not," he said.

Had she, too, begun to suspect him, he wondered?

CHAPTER V

TEMPE

1

One issue still stood out clearly before Grey that night, and appeared no less inevitable when subjected to the unprejudiced judgment of his early morning thought. He must leave Stratton at once.

Fellowes was not to be trusted. His sudden burst of enthusiasm, even if it had been genuine, would not endure the temptation to make his travelling expenses out of the attractive information he had bought—by influence, perhaps—from Mr. Hayles. The details of Fellowes' activity up to this point could be inferred with comparative certainty. He had attempted, in the first place, to use the influential columns of the *Daily Post*, and had been refused by its editor. After that, and armed no doubt with the promise of the non-committal but helpful paragraph that had since been published, he had gone on to the offices

of the *Evening Mail*. But even there he might have been received with a certain hesitation. It seemed probable, however, that the *Mail's* editor had decided, possibly on the strength of the *Daily Post's* "filler," to risk an ambiguously safe leader, and meant to "feature" the story if Fellowes could obtain the claimant's support. That support had been denied, and Fellowes had thrown up the sponge with a curious alacrity. He had made no protestations, no attempt at persuasion. He might have been convinced, but it was more probable that he had still another card to play, a third market for his wares.

Grey was not sufficiently well versed in English journalism to guess what might be the third and lowest stage of the news market; but he knew that there must be papers even less reputable than the *Evening Mail*, papers that might be glad to use such material in the slack season. And the only possible course he could take in the circumstances was to leave Stratton immediately. If some version of the story was made public after he had gone, he could write to Lord Downham, deny any connection with the published report, and make plain his determination never to assert his claim.

And having arranged these plans to his own satisfaction, Grey sighed. He was conscious of a distinct unwillingness to leave Stratton that day; he would have preferred to have had one more serious talk with Lady Tempe before she went out of his life for ever. She interested him. She had discovered to him unexpected depths that he wished to understand. It seemed to him so certain that those inward stirrings of hers, those strange tendencies which she had so desperately tried to inhibit, represented the true greatness of her, and that they ought to be welcomed and encouraged. He wanted to tell her that, and it seemed to him an almost intolerable loss that he would never now have an opportunity. For, apart from the fact that every hour added to the risk of his stay, this was Friday, and if he were to make any excuse of business he could not convincingly leave on a Saturday.

He found his Bradshaw and noted that the best train in the day left Cole-Stratton at 10.45. He must catch that, and then he would be out of the house before the morning papers arrived. But he must not run away; he must see Shepston as soon as possible and explain matters to him.

2

He had finished breakfast by a quarter to nine; the servants had been ready for him this morning, and he wondered vaguely who was responsible for the admirable management of household affairs. He had learned that there was still a rank above Garton among the men-servants, a certain Mr. Hoskin, who filled the high office of house-steward; but surely there must be some correspondingly dignified position on the female side, a super-housekeeper of some kind who ordered the more domestic arrangements.

Garton, respectable to-day in his black morning-coat even at the bourgeois hour of eight o'clock, was uncertain whether Mr. Shepston had yet left his room, but promised to make instant inquiry; and Grey awaited the result of the quest with an uneasiness that he found it impossible to explain away. He had received two quite unimportant letters that morning, and held them in his hand. He had all the semblances that would give colour to his excuse, but he knew that he was an unaccomplished liar. He had had no practice. How

completely he had failed to deceive Fellowes last night! And then his cause had been unquestionably just.

Shepston appeared within five minutes, and if he had in any way hurried his toilet his appearance betrayed no sign of haste. He nodded "Good-morning," and went straight to the breakfast table. "Hope you've had everything you wanted," he said cheerily. "Garton has been a bit scandalised, I expect, by your appearance at a time when all Stratton is supposed to be safely in bed. I generally have breakfast upstairs, but I thought I'd come down this morning and have a chat with you while we've got the house to ourselves. Unless you don't feel equal to conversation so early?"

Grey was puzzled. He could not decide whether this was politeness on Shepston's part or whether Garton had not delivered the message entrusted to him. He might so easily have missed Shepston somewhere between the breakfast-room and his bedroom. Grey knew of three distinct staircases between the ground and first floors, and quite possibly there might be others. He was a little put out by the necessity to introduce his announcement casually.

"I should be very glad to have a long talk with you," he said, "but I'm afraid——"

And then Garton came in ushering Shepston's breakfast; and Grey stopped. He could not bring himself to lie before that larger audience.

Apparently Shepston realised his guest's embarrassment, for he waved the butler and footman aside. "Put 'em down at this end of the table," he said. "You needn't wait." But when the servants had gone he seemed deliberately to avoid giving Grey an opportunity to make his announcement by plunging straight into the topic of the *Evening Mail's* leader.

"It looks as if we're really in for it this time," he said. "Poor Downham's badly upset. I am writing to the *Post* and the *Mail* this morning to insist upon their producing the authority for their statements. If they decline, we are to take action. Definitely libellous, you understand, if they have no warrant for what they've published. There are limits even to the freedom of the English Press." He looked up with his usual polite smile and added, "Very annoying, of course."

"Very," agreed Grey, with considerable feeling; and it suddenly occurred to him that

he had a better excuse for leaving Stratton than a stupid lie about some imaginary business. "I've been thinking," he said, "that under the circumstances it would be better if I went back to London this morning."

Shepston shook his head. "On no account," he said. "We all want you to stay. Downham has asked me to apologise to you—I was leading up to that—for his neglect of you. It has been solely due to this stupid business. He is most anxious to have a long discussion with you on Canadian affairs."

"Later on, perhaps——" began Grey.

"Not a bit of it; this is just the right time. It will be better for Downham and for all of us to divert our minds from this silly claimant story. Indeed, I was congratulating myself only this morning on your being here."

Grey realised that his excuse of business had been horribly compromised by this false start.

"As a matter of fact, it isn't only that," he began, glancing at the letters he still held; but Shepston anticipated him by saying:

"No, no. There is really not the least need for you to be polite and pretend business." He looked at Grey almost affectionately as he

continued, "Honestly now, have you any important business to do in town—anyone you specially wish to see?"

Grey could not face the direct lie. "Why, no," he said; "but——" He was tempted to tell the whole truth. That seemed to him the only means of escaping from this distasteful coil of deceptions in which he had become so innocently entangled. It was all hateful to him, all against the grain of his acquired opinions and his natural bent of mind. Why should he not take Shepston into his confidence, make a complete explanation, and pledge him to secrecy until such time as it might become essential that the Strattons should know the truth of the whole story?

"I'd like to explain——" he said, and stopped. He could not decide what form his confession should take. He was suddenly divided between a desire to defend himself and a revolt against any such implicit admission of guilt. Two days ago he had been a free man, and now he had become enslaved by the influence of this place and its people. He did not want the place, or the position it would give him, but the air of it had in some way hypnotised him. He had deferred to it. The age-old

consciousness of power was in the very spirit of Stratton. He might criticise it, he might even attempt to deny it, but every one of these people, despite their lack of politeness, their carelessness, their apparent attitude towards himself, was hedged about by some dignity, some fine self-reliance that he could not break through. And he was afraid of it; afraid that if he made his confession he might be drawn into closer relations with all that Stratton implied. His hesitation was a symptom that he all too plainly understood. He had not dared to speak the truth; he had wanted to keep the respect of these people whom he had tried to persuade himself that he despised. And it came to him that, if he were to keep his own self-respect, he must face the position his short-sighted acceptance of the original invitation had created. He must take his chance of exposure, and, if it came, he must tell his story openly, and then go.

Shepston had finished his breakfast and was smoking a cigarette. He had waited patiently for his companion to speak, and at last he looked up with his most blandly innocent expression and said:

"Yes? You would like to explain?"

"Well, that I'm not very quick to understand you," Grey replied. "You are a strange people to me. You look at everything from a different angle; you make different assumptions. Now, about this matter of my going away. I'm all in the dark as to what you would all honestly like me to do. It makes very little difference to me, but I wouldn't like to feel that I was stupidly forcing myself upon you just at a time when you'd be glad to have no stranger around."

Shepston had been watching his companion's face with an attention that was quite uncharacteristic of him. He held up his beautifully kept hands now (they could have received little less care than those of his niece) in a gesture of deprecation. "My dear Grey," he said, "you are altogether too subtle. You probe us for hidden motives. You will not believe me when I tell you that we are candid to the pitch of rudeness. I assure you that if Downham and my sister wished you to go, you would become only too painfully conscious of their desire. Indeed, they would not mince matters."

"Very well; I'll take your word for that," Grey said.

"That's good," replied Shepston genially.

It was definitely settled between them that Grey was to stay when Tempe came into the room, but her uncle instantly referred the question to her.

"Here is Grey being excruciatingly polite," he announced; "pretending that he feels himself *de trop* while we are waiting to welcome the unknown heir to Stratton."

Tempe looked at Grey and smiled. "And I have got down at half-past nine—a record," she said, "simply in order to make up for my omissions of yesterday. I intended to have a thoroughly archæological morning."

"Shepston has persuaded me to change my mind," Grey said.

She betrayed no sign of elation at the news. "Then you'll have to continue your education," she said vaguely; and turned to her uncle. "We're booked for a drive to Peddlesmore this afternoon," she said; "to call on the doting dowager. O Lord!"

"I know," Shepston said.

Grey was sure of one thing: Shepston suspected the truth. Of the other members of the family he was uncertain, but he intended to find out that morning about one of them.

He had a feeling that he would have had no difficulty in telling his story to Lady Tempe. He was sure that she would understand.

3

And after all they never went near the ruins of old Stratton.

"I'm taking you to see our view," Tempe said, as they came out into the park. "It's only a two-mile walk."

"Isn't that a shameful neglect of duty?" asked Grey.

"I'm doing my duty this afternoon," she said. "All the duty I'm up to in one day—a stately call on the old duchess, who is senile and quite deaf. We shall leave you Dickie to play golf with."

"And if I'm cross-examined about the ruins?" he suggested.

"It's really quite easy to tell the truth," she said coldly.

"I've discovered that," he replied. He felt checked, even a little angry. With one remark she had destroyed his sense of some vague common understanding that had, he thought, been established between them.

"Yes?" she returned; and her tone was an impertinence.

"I would not have made any pretence at all last night if you hadn't given me a lead," he said.

"Oh, that!" remarked Tempe carelessly. "That was only a joke."

He resented the description; he preferred to fancy that they had shared a secret; but the implication of her remark was of more importance than the dissolution of his pleasure in their supposed confederacy.

"Have you found me lying on other occasions?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said.

"You are making rather strange insinuations, Lady Tempe," he said seriously. His earlier doubts had returned to him. It seemed to him that she was trying to probe his secret. Was it not, indeed, quite probable that she and her uncle had plotted against him? Perhaps the whole family had succeeded in getting some private information — possibly through the editor of the *Daily Post*—and that now they meant to make him confess himself? He saw it was conceivable that they might offer to bribe him. He cared nothing for that, but it hurt

him curiously to think that the girl beside him might be acting the part of a spy.

She did not appear to hear him, and made some inappropriate remark about a startled squirrel that chattered at them from the high branches of a beech.

He ignored the squirrel. "I think I have a right to ask you what you mean by implying that I don't speak the truth?" he insisted.

"Well, do you?" she asked; and looked at him with a hard, slightly contemptuous scrutiny.

"Why should you doubt it?" he returned. He felt no impulse to confession at that moment, but rather a keen determination to parry her attempt to draw some admission from him.

She pursed her lips. "It isn't of the least consequence," she said, "and I'm not interested in knowing whether you tell the truth or not. Shall we talk of something else? Squirrels, for instance. If you knew England well, you might be a trifle surprised to find so many wild things on an estate like this. In most places there's nothing left but game. Where they preserve pheasants, you know, the gamekeepers shoot everything else for the sake of them.

Even the smaller singing birds, in some cases, I've heard."

"But why?" asked Grey, interested in spite of himself.

"The gamekeepers get a lust for killing, Reggie says."

"Then you don't preserve pheasants here?"

"Father won't. We've got another place in Northamptonshire that we go to for the shooting."

"And yet," Grey said, "you carry out the principle on the human scale. This place is preserved for you. You and other families like you are the lordly pheasants, and all the smaller birds have to be kept down to give you precedence. Look at all this parkland; it's unproductive, wasted; good land that is being kept for your pleasure, and you visit it—how often, three times a year?" He was glad of an opportunity to express himself, and in doing so to condemn the Strattons. He was suddenly bitter against them all, and more particularly against this beautiful girl who thought she could so easily make a fool of him.

"Do you really believe all that?" she asked, with a little sneer.

"It's my religion," he said.

"I've never had much faith in people who made a profession of their religion," she retorted.

"And naturally, as you said last night, you would prefer not to believe in mine."

"It's so easy to be a Socialist when you have everything to gain by it," she commented.

"What have I to gain?" he asked.

"I've been wondering," she said.

"What an intolerable family you are!" he broke out. "You are so sure of yourselves, so utterly regardless of the feelings of anyone outside your own precious little circle. You have told me to be honest, and you certainly have set me an example in kind; well, I am taking your advice and speaking my mind about you all."

"Is that the only form your honesty takes?" she put in.

He attempted no answer to that question. Undoubtedly she was pumping him, pricking him on by small insults to make a clean breast of his whole position. He had solved the problem he had come out to solve; he knew now that she also suspected him. He felt something very like hate for her at that moment, not because she so misjudged him—

that was comprehensible enough—but because she was in league with her family against him. Indeed, the thought of her complicity in some Stratton plot to make him confess himself, seemed an altogether unendurable thing. He felt that he could not remain any longer in her presence, and the contemplation of another four or five days' stay at the Hall was a misery too great to be borne.

For some minutes they walked on in silence, and then she said quietly, "That is our view."

He looked up and gazed before him with a faint gasp of amazement.

They had come to the highest point of the park, and at their feet the ground broke and plunged down into a steep, grass-grown cliff dominating the rolling foot-hills that flowed in broad undulations down to the keel of the valley. On the farther side, misty blue in the soft, almost visible air of the hot forenoon, the outpost tors of the moor behind Okehampton rose faintly through the haze. It was all intensely English, with some quality about it of Irish fertility and nurtured richness; but the breadth and colour of it, the vivid beauty of the gentle hills and the great masses of wood filling the fall and rise of the wide valley with

a satisfying detail that led the eye across to those ultimate bastions of Dartmoor, splendidly mysterious in the exaggerated distance—all this sweeping loveliness of form and tint brought a wonderful, inexplicable sense of repose and ecstasy.

Grey became conscious that Tempe was speaking after, as it seemed to him, an immense interval of absorption.

"... And before rain," she was saying, "the tors grow black and hard, and march closer, and the valley gets narrower and steeper, and you wonder if the moors aren't coming to wipe out the park, until the mist and clouds fall all over them and wrap them away; and then the south wind brings the mist across the valley, and you stand here and wait for the rain."

He thrilled at the picture she had conjured up and at the knowledge that he and she at that moment so perfectly understood one another. It was quite impossible that they were the same two people who had quarrelled so rudely as they came through the wood.

"I feel the raindrops on my face," he murmured, "like little, lost, drifting spirits." And he shivered as if he were suddenly cold.

Tempe laughed. "In this hot sunshine?" she said. "Shall we sit down?"

4

He turned his attention from the view and looked at her. She had her hands clasped round her knees, and was still staring out towards the mysteries of the distant moor. He thought that all the beauty of the valley had found human expression in her face.

"I have been doubting you," he said at last.

"Doubting *me?*" Her eyes met his and opened with that round, somewhat insolent wonder she could so effectively assume.

He was not to be balked. He nodded gravely. "You shall have the truth," he said. "I believed that you were a spy, a Stratton spy in league with your family, set on to catch me tripping."

"Mercy!" she ejaculated softly; and then, "You admit you were there to be caught?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Don't begin again," he said. "When you spoke of the moors just now I knew that we might be friends. There is something in you that I

understand. Perhaps it's the bond of blood between us."

She set her lips together and turned her face away from him. "Is it really true?" she asked.

"Absolutely," he replied.

"But why haven't you made the claim before?"

"For the same reason that I haven't made it now."

"Not openly," she flashed at him. "That is what I've been hating you for."

"You can't mean that you think I was responsible for those newspaper paragraphs?" he asked.

"Well, of course I thought so," she said emphatically.

"After all I had said to you?"

"I thought that must be humbug; part of the game."

"Good God!" he said, with a spurt of temper.

She leaned a little towards him. "And what about you?" she retorted. "You thought I was a filthy, mean, prevaricating spy."

"Yes, but I acquitted *you* without asking to hear your defence."

"I should think you jolly well did," she said.

"You think that you ought to be above suspicion, but that I——"

"Had better explain yourself at once," she interrupted.

"I resent the insinuation," he said. "Can't you believe me without explanations?"

"Oh, bless the man!" Tempe exclaimed impatiently. "Can't you see that I'm bursting with curiosity?"

"There's nothing to tell," he said. "I was a damned fool in the first place to accept Lady Downham's invitation. I was interested in you as a family. You were a new species to me. I thought these people have asked me because they expect to be bored in Devonshire, and they can't get anyone else to stay there just now."

"Perfectly true," Tempe interpolated.

"Well," Grey went on, "how in Heaven's name could I know that at that very time an American journalist should have just arrived in London with information about me that he had blackmailed out of the one man in Canada who knows the truth?"

"Who was that?" she asked quickly.

"The tutor who went over with Edward Stratton. His name's William Hayles. He settled in Toronto and made a pile."

"Well, you must confess that it was a wonderful coincidence," she remarked thoughtfully, and added, "how long have you known that you were Edward Stratton's son?"

"Nearly fifteen years," he said. "My mother told me the whole story."

"They really were married?"

"Sure. I've got an attested copy of the certificate."

"You could prove it up to the hilt if you wanted to?"

He nodded. "That tutor Hayles was a witness to the marriage," he said.

For a few moments she stared out over the valley in silence, and it was Grey who spoke first.

"If your curiosity is satisfied, there are a few questions that I should like to ask you," he said.

"Such as——" she suggested.

"How did you know about me?"

"You told me, practically. The things you said down at the old Hall last night put me on the track; and then—when you came into

the drawing-room after you had seen that journalist person—I suppose that was the man who came to see you?—well, you absolutely gave it all away."

"And when did you really begin to doubt me?"

"After I went upstairs last night. I began to think. I tried to make out a case for you; I did, honestly; and I didn't hate you much then. But just now, in the wood, I felt sure you were a humbug. You put me off so—so speciously."

She did not look at him as she spoke, and he watched her with an absorbed admiration.

"I followed the same lines," he said when she paused. "In the wood I hated you fiercely."

She turned her head slightly and looked at him out of the corners of her eyes. "If I hadn't suspected you, too," she remarked, "I would never have forgiven you for thinking me a spy. Eugh!"

"I had some excuse," he explained. "I had begun to feel hunted, and that's an unpleasant feeling for an innocent man. There's your uncle, too——"

"You don't think he suspects," she inter-

rupted; and she swung round and faced him, suddenly alert and a little anxious.

"I do," he replied. "I've been fencing with him for nearly twenty-four hours now." And he told her how Mr. Shepston had caught him examining the *Daily Post* in the hall the day before, of their diplomacy on the links, and of Shepston's apparent eagerness to keep the Stratton visitor that morning.

"He's so clever," Tempe said. She narrowed her eyes and looked into some invisible distance as she weighed the evidence submitted to her. "He wanted to keep you till he was certain," she announced, "and, perhaps, to stop you doing anything more with the papers. And yet he likes you, I know."

"He may be pretending that for his own purposes," suggested Grey.

"To you, yes," she returned; "but not to me. Unless—I wonder——" She stopped abruptly, and then Grey saw her blush for the first time.

"I do wish you wouldn't stare," she said impatiently.

"I didn't realise——" he said, dropped his eyes, and then went on, "You were going to

say about your uncle that he wouldn't pretend to you that he liked me unless——"

"I forget," she replied curtly. "You put it out of my head by staring."

"But it's rather important to me," he urged.

"Why?"

"Well, I want to know what Mr. Shepston's attitude is likely to be."

"I can't see that it can make any difference."

"It can," he said. "If he were to tell your father and mother that I——"

"He won't do that," she said positively. "Not until he is absolutely certain. You see, Uncle Reggie runs us—all of us. He writes all father's speeches, and does everything. He is the Stratton 'ghost,' if you know what I mean. And he is tremendously fond of us all, and we are simply devoted to him; but he doesn't trust any of us to do a thing for ourselves—not my father, or anyone. So, you see, what I'm coming to is that he won't say a word about you until he has worked out his whole plan, and then he'll just give us our parts, and we shall have to play them. Dear Reggie, how he must be enjoying himself now! He's never

had quite such a big thing as this to tackle before. Do lead him on a little. Make him think you're really going to claim the title."

"I can't monkey with this," Grey replied decisively.

"Do you take it so seriously?" she asked lightly, as if she, who half an hour before had found him worthy of hate, could now only regard him as a means of amusement.

"You were serious, too, a while ago," he said.

"No, merely irritable, because you thwarted my curiosity," replied Tempe.

He reflected for a moment, remembering their conversation by the gateway of the old Hall, and then decided to venture an explanation of her mood.

"I'd have said," he began, "that you'd been suffering another temptation — one of those unpleasant temptations to taste the reality of life you spoke about last night."

"*How* clever of you!" she remarked on a note of ridicule.

He was not to be thwarted by her taunts. "I'm not much of a psychologist," he went on, "but I have a feeling now and again that I understand you in some queer way. It's a

feeling that comes and goes, but when I have it I just feel dead sure."

"Got it now?" she asked.

"I have," he said. "I may be quite wrong, but I feel sure that you've been looking out at life, and that you're afraid of it. Something tells you that it's the only chance you have to make the best of yourself, but you won't listen——"

"Oh, shut up!" she interrupted him sharply. "You're only elaborating what I told you, and getting prosy and preachy about it. If you're going to be steam-rollerish, I'm going back."

Grey smiled. He knew that he was staring at her again, but he dared to go on staring. Her rebuff had not discouraged him; indeed, it had given him a strange sense of pleasure. He felt that nothing she could say or do could possibly offend him again, that every look and word of hers must ever be for him a perfect and characteristic expression of her beauty.

"Are you so afraid — even of my reminder?" he asked.

She looked at him disdainfully. "Afraid?" she said, "of you?"

He nodded complacently.

She returned his stare for a moment, and then suddenly snapped her fingers at him. "Stratton!" she said.

He flushed slightly at that taunt. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You!" she said. "How you could ever have been in the house a minute without our guessing, I don't know. Why, you're a self-sufficient, self-satisfied Stratton to the backbone. It's taken another shape, that's all. You haven't got the money or the position, so you've found another cause for self-congratulation. My dear man, you're only an intellectual, ethical aristocrat, who thinks himself a shade too good for the merely titled members of his own family." She clapped her hands excitedly. "Oh, why didn't I see that before?" she asked the landscape.

He did not answer her at once. He was remembering how anxiously his mother had watched for some sign in him of Stratton blood, and had never found one. She had looked for the mark of his father's temperament, because he was the only one of the race known to her. It might well be, Grey thought, that he had inherited many qualities from Stratton that his mother had not the knowledge

to recognise. The possibility did not shock him as it might have shocked him a few weeks before.

"We're quits, then," he remarked quietly.

"Why quits?" she asked.

"I mean we can argue from the same level —as relatives. I hesitated to claim that till you found evidences in my character; but now, as a half-first-cousin, and as representing the elder branch, I shall certainly take it upon me to try and save you from the horror of living for amusement."

She preferred to answer the faintly bantering tone of his voice rather than the underlying seriousness of his words.

"This is one of the things you *can* 'monkey' with, I suppose?" she suggested.

He became grave at once. "No," he said; "I was never more in earnest."

She shook her head impatiently. "I don't like you in the rôle of professor," she announced with decision. "And it's time we were going back. Are you coming? You needn't if you'd sooner stay, but we are having lunch early because of this deadly visit of state."

"I prefer to come back with you," he said, getting to his feet; and then he faced her and

added: "But I mean to talk to you about your duty to yourself and to life."

A spasm of temper crossed her face; she set her teeth, and her eyes were dark with a sudden fierce resentment. "I won't listen," she said. "If you ever try to talk to me about that again, I shall take no more notice of you."

"I'll risk that," he returned quietly.

"If you do I shall hate you," she said; and, indeed, at that moment her face expressed a very positive dislike of him.

He did not shrink from her. "Why fight so desperately against all that is best in yourself?" he asked.

And then her mood suddenly gave way. She seemed, incredibly, on the verge of tears.

"Oh, do leave me alone!" she said. "I can't change myself; you must see that I can't. Please drop that subject. I was insane to start it."

And, with that curious comprehension of her moods that had come to him, he realised that for the present he would be wise to give way to her. But he knew that he had beaten her, that he had the power to subdue her, and he was furiously, ecstatically glad.

"Very well," he said. "I'll drop that

subject now." He paused and added: "We're still friends?"

"I don't know," she returned. "You're a quite objectionable bully. I don't think I could ever like you."

He laughed happily. "What was it you were telling me about squirrels a while ago?" he said. "I have a feeling that we'd do well to discuss squirrels on the way back."

But, almost inevitably, their conversation gravitated towards his heirship to Stratton. They shared an important secret that brought them together in an alliance, while the rest of the family were beyond a fence that they must be prevented from scaling; and the important adversary was Shepston, at once generalissimo and scout for his side.

Some sense of desertion from her own party was evidently in Tempe's mind, for as soon as they had started she put aside some irrelevant remark of her companion's and said: "It bothers me rather that I can't tell any of them, but I suppose it wouldn't do." She made him understand by her manner that this thing must be seriously discussed.

"If once the fact were admitted," Grey said, "I should either have to prove it or allow

you all to think me a liar and a sharp; and if I produced my evidence I should put Lord Downham in a very equivocal position."

Tempe shook her head. "I see that it wouldn't do," she agreed; and then looked up at him and asked: "Would nothing ever tempt you to claim all this? Can't you think of any conceivable thing that might tempt you to do it?"

His "No" was given without the least shade of hesitation. "If I wanted anything very badly," he explained, and he had a newborn application in his mind that was strangely thrilling and attractive, "I wouldn't be proud to win it that way."

"But if it were the only way?" she submitted.

"Why, I wouldn't think the thing worth winning," he said.

"Oh!" Tempe commented, as if she found little satisfaction in that statement of his opinion; and then she went on quickly: "Of course, it's only Uncle Reggie that you need be afraid of; all the others are perfectly safe; they would as soon suspect you of being the American President in disguise as the rightful heir to Stratton."

"Yes; I'm afraid of your uncle," Grey admitted.

"It would be awful if the truth came out," Tempe went on after a thoughtful pause. "Appalling! I can't imagine what the effect would be on the poor old pater. It would break him up altogether, I think. He's the one that really counts. I don't think Mother would be badly hurt. She doesn't get much joy out of it, as it is; and just the title wouldn't mean anything to her. And it would do Dickie a lot of good; he wants waking up——" She broke off and looked up at him with a friendly smile. "But I'm glad you're so safe," she remarked.

Grey felt the blood rush to his face. If he had ever felt any need for support, that simple statement of hers would have reinforced his determination a hundredfold; but it was so sweet that he longed to hear it repeated. "How do you know I'm so safe?" he asked.

They were under the high stone wall that fenced the gardens on the north side, and Tempe's fingers were on the handle of the little green door before she replied. "You're so strong," she said, with a little sigh; and then she pushed the door open, and they were

within speaking distance of the head gardener. Tempe called to him at once. "Oh, Mr. McFie," she said, "aren't any of the wall peaches ripe yet? I like them so much better than those out of the houses."

"Well, I'm no sure, melady, that they'll be just ready the day," McFie replied.

"He's always like that," Tempe explained, as she and Grey went on towards the house. "Whatever you ask him, there's always a 'doot' about it." And she kept to the fruitful topic of McFie until they had entered the house.

5

But Grey was well satisfied with the hope she had given him. He faced the situation in a new light that afternoon. He could no longer pretend to evade the fact that he was in love with Lady Tempe Stratton, and he found nothing but happiness in the recognition. He had to confront the obstacles that lay between him and the attainment of his desire; and the greatest of them, as he believed, was Tempe's own unwillingness. He did not flatter himself for one instant that she was in love with him;

he hardly contemplated the possibility — that was something too wonderful to be within his scope as yet. But he believed that he had reason to hope. She had admitted a certain admiration for him. She had found him worthy of liking, and had accepted his unsupported statements about his parentage without a moment's hesitation. More than this, she had admitted last night—and as he saw it with even greater conviction this morning—that she was greatly tempted to explore the risks of life. He relied immensely on that expression of her individuality. He saw such fine possibilities in her acknowledgment that her present life did not satisfy her. In the flush of his afternoon's enthusiasm he had faith in his own power to influence her; he cherished the exquisite thought that in some sense they understood one another.

And beside that overwhelming problem of Tempe's own consent, the lesser obstacles showed dimly as mere vexations that might for a time postpone the ultimate attainment. The opposition of her family was a thing that could have little weight with her, he thought, and might be overcome by sheer persistence on his own part. It was possible that Shepston's

influence might be thrown into the scale against the Strattons. And it came to Grey that Tempe might have had the same thought when she had so cleverly shirked any explanation of her uncle's possible reason for pretending a feeling of friendship for the man who was threatening the stability of Stratton. Undoubtedly she had meant that, Grey thought, recalling her sudden blush and her hesitation. For a time he lingered over the memory, finding encouragement in the reflection that the possibility had been so near the surface of her own mind. She had, perhaps, even considered him as a means to explore the great world outside her experience.

And with Shepston as an ally the opposition of the family appeared insignificant. Grey found it in his heart to be more than a little sorry for them.

A slight reaction came before the afternoon was over. When he had played his round with Stratton, had tea with him, and finally escaped from the vexation of talking golf while his thoughts were soaring among visions of an incredibly beautiful future, Grey wandered down toward the gate of the park through which, as his inquiry had made clear, the motor

party must certainly return. They would be home between five and six o'clock, Tempe had said.

There was no lodge at the east gate, which was only a subsidiary and little used entrance, and for a time Grey leaned against the pier of the wicket, looked out across the narrow Devonshire lane, and watched a reaper at work in the field opposite. But presently he turned back into the park. There was little traffic in the lane, but it annoyed him that the occasional passers-by should so subserviently curtsy or touch their hats to him. Even a prosperous-looking man in a rubber-tyred dogcart touched his hat—a tenant of the estate, no doubt.

He looked at his watch and found that the time was a quarter to seven. A sudden feeling of doubt and loneliness came to him. He began to wonder if he had not been unduly elated that morning. All that he had believed a sign of encouragement might have been no more than evidence of something like pity. She had admired his determination, and had been a little sorry for him; had condescended with a charming sympathy to enter for a moment into a point of view that must have been utterly remote from her own. And at

that thought he was suddenly conscious of bitter desolation; he felt forsaken and alone, as he had felt when his mother died. He shook his head impatiently and walked briskly back to the gate, as if he would escape from his fears by physical exercise. He went out into the lane, and looked up to where the road leaped into sight as it crossed the ridge of the near hills.

But no motor was visible, and though he listened attentively through an interval of silence afforded by the cessation of the whirring, clacking reaper, he could hear no distant drumming of the car ascending the farther side of the ridge.

She had gone out of his life that afternoon; had gone back into the world of her own people. She was away from him, giving him no thought; and he had no hold on her, no power to recall her. And yet in his heart he felt that in some way they two had always belonged to each other, that he had come from Canada only to meet and claim her.

Soon after seven o'clock he gave up his vigil and hurried back to the house. He thought that he must have missed them, that they had returned by some other gate; and he had left

himself barely enough time to walk the two miles back through the park and to dress for dinner.

He was just entering the Stratton gardens when he heard the motor coming up behind him.

Tempe hardly looked at him as the car passed.

And at dinner Lady Adelaide began, and the others continued, a conversation that played round the central topic of Tempe's probable engagement to a certain Eddie Yaxley, whom Grey presently placed as the son of the Marquis of Cheshire, and heir to the dukedom of Liverpool. Incidentally this Eddie Yaxley was his own second cousin, he remembered.

They spoke of this possible alliance with no sort of reserve or hesitation, and Tempe herself came in with various comments and objections, and with no more appearance of self-consciousness than if she had been discussing the engagement of a distant relative.

"If only I could take Eddie seriously for one minute," she said once; "but he's so exactly like everyone I've ever met."

Lady Adelaide made her usual preparations

for speech, and then looked up, with a chuckle. "Bless you, Tempe," she said, "that's his charm; and, thank God, we've all of us got it. If you want to marry anyone who hasn't, you'll have to run off with an organ-grinder, like Eddie's great-aunt of precious memory. And she didn't get much fun out of it, poor thing. I'm not sure she didn't come down to living at Ostend or some other awful place before she died."

"I say, was that the claimant's grandmother?" asked Stratton. "I should say he'd be a bit of a sport if he took after her."

Tempe looked thoughtfully at her brother as if she were pondering some comment on his remark, and then said: "Who won this afternoon?"

"Oh, Grey—six and four, and the bye, two up. He was all round me," Stratton replied.

Grey had a momentary wish that he had not played quite so well. If he had been right off his game, Tempe might have inferred that his mind had been given to other things.

"I fancy you hardly did yourself justice," he said to Stratton; and then Lady Downham, who had been following her own line of thought, broke in with:

"I think the engagement ought to be announced in October."

Grey expected a fierce rejection of this drastic proposal; he believed that Tempe had only been trifling with the topic so far—he had hoped that perhaps she was even teasing him—but she showed no sign of any perturbation as she said:

"Oughtn't you to get Eddie's consent first?"

Her father had taken little part in the earlier conversation, but he joined in now by saying:

"Eddie's willingness is—is understood. Cheshire and I were talking about it at—at Goodwood. The old duke is very—very anxious to have the affair settled."

"Eddie has never mentioned it to me," Tempe said pertly. "I do think he might have let me know that we are engaged. I had no idea. It's very embarrassing."

"Seems to have come down from Scotland on purpose to see you," remarked Stratton. "Pretty decent hint, I should think. When's he coming over?"

"He may be coming to-morrow," Lady Downham said. "He wasn't quite sure."

"One of the hunters was seedy," put in Tempe. "It depended on that. Probably he meant to propose to me to-day, and forgot it. If the mare's no better, perhaps he'll wire: 'Hadn't we better get engaged, old girl?—Yours, Eddie.' I distinctly remember his calling me 'old girl' when I was six, and he's never lost the habit. I rather admired him in those days."

Grey made no attempt to join in the conversation. He was furiously angry. The Strattons were once again treating him as a negligible outsider, and now, for the first time, he resented their attitude. In thought he had that day come very near to them all, had regarded them in the new light of being Tempe's relatives; in his mind he had opposed and conquered them. But chiefly his anger had flamed up against Tempe. He could not believe that she was serious in her quiet acceptance of an engagement to this man for whom she had so obviously no more sentiment than that of a peculiarly placid friendship. He thought that she was being false to herself and unfair to her father and mother in thus pretending to encourage them in their project of re-confirming the old tradition of a Yaxley-

Stratton alliance. He knew from that monograph he had read on the first morning of his stay that this tradition went far back into the history of the two families. The latest record was of the marriage between his own grandparents, but plainly the disaster that had followed that particular match was not to be treated as a precedent.

He tried to hide the expression of his impatience, and caught Shepston regarding him with that bland stare which he had come to mistrust.

"Must seem queer to you, Grey," Shepston said, "to find yourself back in the Middle Ages —all this old business of state-arranged alliances, eh?"

"I was puzzled," Grey said, "to know why the high contracting parties had not been married by proxy while they were in the schoolroom."

He looked at Tempe, but her eyes avoided his. She was smiling with a kind of demure amusement.

He determined that he must speak to her alone some time during the evening.

Lady Downham was saying that the practice of marriage by proxy was confined to royalty.

"Indeed?" Grey said.

"I'm sure I don't know why," Lady Downham concluded.

6

After dinner Grey fretted impatiently through a dreary half-hour on the terrace. He tried continually to catch Tempe's eye, but she would not look at him, and she had managed to wedge herself into an unapproachable position between her mother and Lady Adelaide. He knew quite well that she was aware of his attempts to attract her notice, and it angered him to see the easy, self-confident way in which, as she talked, she could single him out for avoidance. Even when he directly addressed her she would answer without looking at him, and yet so naturally that no onlooker could have guessed that she had any purpose in not meeting his glance. He hated to think that her cleverness should be directed against himself, but as yet he was chiefly resentful of her long-continued persecution of him. He believed that if he could see her for ten minutes alone he could break through her assumption of indifference.

He refused Stratton's invitation to billiards

with a slight brusquerie, and, walking to the edge of the terrace, stood there for a few moments leaning over the balustrade with his back to the little party under the drawing-room windows; and when he turned round, Lady Downham and Lady Adelaide were standing up, and Tempe and Stratton had disappeared.

"Coming in?" asked Shepston.

Grey shook his head. "Not yet," he said; but he went to the drawing-room windows when the bridge-party had sat down to their game, and satisfied himself that Tempe was not one of them.

She might be upstairs with her brother in the billiard-room, he thought, and hesitated for a moment as to whether he would not go and seek her there. And then, with a sudden contempt for the feeble, beseeching part he must appear to be playing, he walked down the terrace, past the portico, to the place where he and she had talked two nights before. He would run after her no longer, he decided. He was acting the supplicant, the weak, entreating lover. No; if she would not speak to him of her own accord, he would make no effort to thrust himself upon her. And he had a hope that if she wanted to see him she would look

for him in this place. It was a perfect night—he would wait for her here.

He leaned his arms on the breast-high balustrade and stared out over the park. In the west the pale sickle of the young moon was dipping below the trees.

7

He had been there more than an hour when he heard the whisper of a silk dress on the terrace behind him. He did not turn round, but a picture of her sprang up suddenly before his eyes, as he had seen her at dinner, pretending demure amusement. She had been dressed in black that night, with a single blossom of scarlet geranium in her hair. She had looked older, he thought, and less simple. He had had a glimpse of what she might become if she married the future Duke of Liverpool—a brilliant, versatile, insincere woman.

She came and lifted herself on to the balustrade with the same easy grace she had shown two nights ago; but to-night she did not speak. She was evidently waiting for him to begin, but he did not even look at her. Now that she was there so near him he had forgotten his

resentment and he was afraid—afraid lest he might not have the strength and courage to hold her there.

If he began now to argue with her, to reproach her, make any appeal, she might leave him alone and desolate once more. If only she would stay he felt that he could forgive her anything.

"Nice night," she remarked at last.

He looked up at her then; he could just see the outline of her and the gleam of her white shoulders and arms under the starlight. She was not looking at him, and he thought there was something a little constrained in her attitude, as if, now, she was striving rather desperately for the insouciance she plainly meant to attempt.

He could not pretend banter at that moment. He felt that, at whatever risk, he must know the truth.

"You're not going to marry this Yaxley man?" he said; and though he had meant to make a statement he found that he had asked a question.

"I can't help myself," she said quietly.

"Do you mean that?" His tone was almost violent.

"Certainly," she said.

"But you don't care two buttons about him," he returned. "Do you admit that you will let yourself be badgered into a marriage like that? Why, it just means misery for you both."

"You don't understand," she said, and her voice was very cold and even. "I've known Eddie all my life, and I like him very much."

"And you are content to drift through life, to do nothing, to become a mere conventional Society puppet, to live without love or passion for any person or thing on this earth?" he asked vehemently.

"Quite," she said. "I think I implied as much this morning. That is the life for which I am peculiarly fitted."

"By God, you shan't marry this fellow!" he broke out. "I will not let you."

"Speaking as head of the family?" she put in.

"No; speaking as Arthur Grey, a simple Canadian citizen," he said.

"I can't think that you will have much influence with the family," she commented.

"Nor with you?" he asked passionately.

"Nor with me," she replied.

He came closer to her, so close that he could see her eyes in the half-darkness of the August night. "If I were the Marquis of Downham, would you marry me?" he asked.

She leaned a little towards him, so that their faces were but a few inches apart.

"If I said 'Yes,' would you make your claim?" she said.

"Never in a thousand years." His answer came without hesitation, with a ringing conviction that could not be questioned.

She drew back slightly. "I am not worth so much?" she asked.

"You! Why, you're worth the whole world!" he said. "It's for your sake that I wouldn't claim it. I wouldn't condemn you to fossilisation. I wouldn't see you grow to become a prejudiced, selfish aristocrat, with no ideas outside your own silly position, keeping yourself alive by pampering your own vanity. You're too good for that. You're fine. You've got a soul and an intelligence. Come out of this false world of yours and live, and you'll be one of the great women of your time. Maybe your name won't be in the London papers, and no one will know the sort of work you are doing; but you'll be realising yourself, getting

the best out of your life—you can't do more than that."

"How am I to do all this?" she asked.

He hesitated a moment, and then took his fate in his hands. "By marrying me—as I am," he said simply.

"Please don't," she said. "Surely you realise that that is utterly impossible?" She dropped down from the balustrade, and when he put out his hand as if he would hold her, she slipped past him in the darkness.

"Tempe!" he called.

She did not answer him.

CHAPTER VI

SHEPSTON

1

He did not take that very definite refusal as in any sense final. He was inclined to neglect her feeling for himself—he knew that she liked him, all his sense of their mutual understanding told him that — but he gave much anxious thought to the consideration of her attitude toward her own desires, her own life. It was so clear that, after her one unguarded moment of expression by the gateway of the old Hall, she had faced her problem and decided for her own world. The visit to the old Duchess of Liverpool and the meeting with Yaxley had confirmed her in her choice. She had opposed the uneasiness of her finer spirit, and for a time, at least, she had conquered. And Grey, with a sturdy confidence in his own influence, believed that he might revive the struggle, and that eventually the spirit of Lady Tempe Stratton must triumph over her material long-

ings for the satisfactions of her position and power. It was incredible to him, biased as much on one side as she on the other, that any other termination could be possible. He attached little importance to the threat of the formal engagement she had held over him. He hardly believed her serious in that; but even if some freak urged her to find another refuge from temptation in an announcement of her intention to marry Eddie Yaxley, it would not constitute a binding promise. If she could treat the making of it so lightly, the breaking could hardly be a matter of very great importance.

He saw no reason why he should not now stay another week at Stratton. His absorption in the thought of Tempe had sent his fear of some journalistic exposure of his identity into the background. He hoped fervently that no such exposure would be made, but the chance of it had ceased to scare him. If it came, he must make full explanation; surely, he thought, not such a difficult matter when Tempe already knew the whole story.

And so steady was his mind, so fixed his opinions with regard to his own objects in life, that never for one moment did he contemplate

the possibility of making his claim to all that wealth and honour which would instantly put Tempe within his reach. She had become the dearest thing in his life. He believed that if she were lost to him he could never again find the old zest in any occupation or purpose. In those few days he had come to the realisation that she was the true complement of himself, the essential and only possible companion and wife for whom he had waited, and for whom, all unknowingly, he had kept his mind and body clean. But the influence of that persistent training his mother had given him was manifested now in a curious rigidity toward this one subject. No mediæval saint was ever more convinced of the truth of his religion than was Grey of his own opinion in this regard. The saint might have been tempted to venial sin, but never to deny his God; and in the same way Grey was sublimely unconscious of any temptation to claim Stratton. In that he was, as yet, a bigot.

Nevertheless, among all his apparent certitudes, he was conscious of an earnest hope that Mr. Yaxley's mare would keep him away from the Hall that day. Grey was aware, for the first time in his life, that he was not free from

the vice of jealousy. He knew that he was being unreasonable, and vainly argued with himself; but the picture of Tempe and this unknown man away together somewhere in the park, filled him with an impatient fury that he could not control.

Tempe kept out of his way that morning. He had expected that she would, and was not the less disappointed when his expectation was fulfilled. He went into the library at ten o'clock, spent a restless, miserable hour there trying to read, and then went down to the ruins of the old Hall. He was like a very young angler who, having once caught a fish in a certain pool, haunts the same spot with persistent confidence. If she wants to find me, Grey thought, she will in all probability look for me here; but after a perfunctory study of architectural remains, continually interrupted by a return to the point from which he could just see the green door in the high wall of the garden, he set off, a little wistfully, to the second spot that was associated with her presence — to the green cliff that parted the broad valley between Stratton and Dartmoor.

The walk relieved his impatience, and when

he had spent a few abstracted minutes in gazing at the view, he decided to explore the park farther, partly for the sake of the walk, and partly as an exercise in discipline—he must put the thought of meeting her out of his head for the time being; he would certainly see her at lunch. And he had a whole week yet before him.

His detour presently landed him at the gate on the lane, and he found that if he walked back from there at a reasonably slow pace he would arrive at the Hall just in time for lunch.

He had gone about a mile when he heard the warning hoot of a motor behind him. He stood aside to let the car pass, and carefully observed its occupants as they approached him. One was obviously a chauffeur, the other was a broad-shouldered, handsome man of thirty or so, with a short, brown moustache. Grey had no doubt that he was the Honourable Edward Yaxley.

The car was going slowly, and as it passed the two men stared into each other's eyes for a moment. An observer might have noticed a certain physical resemblance between them.

2

TEMPE was late for lunch. She came in after they had all sat down, gave a vague nod which included everyone, and took her place next to Yaxley.

"So the mare's better?" she said.

"Not necessarily, you know," Yaxley replied.

"Necessarily," Tempe said firmly. "You wouldn't have come if she hadn't been."

"Well, as a matter of fact, she is," Yaxley admitted; "but I was coming in any case."

"Don't be obvious," returned Tempe; and then she looked across the table at Grey.

"What have you been doing all the morning?" she asked. "Writing a pamphlet in the Socialist interest, or mugging in the library?"

Grey searched her expression for any evidence—even if it were only some faint defiance—of a remembrance of their parting on the terrace; but her smile and slight air of condescension were just such as might have marked her attitude to any such unimportant visitor as himself.

"I was in the library for an hour or so,"

he said quietly; "but I don't think I 'mugged.' In fact, I'm not quite sure that I know how one 'mugs.'"

"Oh! Isn't that a Canadian word?" asked Tempe brightly. "I expect I got it from Dickie. It's the same as 'swatting,' you know —grinding, stuffing over books."

Grey nodded carelessly. He was determined that she should not be allowed to score off him in that company. "Your English slang is very inexpressive," he said. "It seems designed to conceal its meaning. Now, American slang definitely aims at some kind of expression."

Tempe appeared to be surprised. "Does it?" she asked. "I've seen samples of it that were simply gibberish to me."

"Only because you didn't recognise the root-words," Grey replied. "And, naturally, journalists and a certain class of writers tend to elaborate to a ridiculous extent; but that's for the most part meant as an absurdity." He spoke to her as if he were politely correcting a precocious child.

"How interesting!" Tempe remarked; and turned to Yaxley. "Did you ride over?" she asked.

"No; I motored," he said.

And then the conversation was split up into groups. Grey found that Lady Adelaide was asking him a question, and his attention was distracted from the two people opposite. To snub Tempe had hurt him even more than her pretence of indifference; but he dared do nothing else in that company when she so deliberately set out to patronise him. The only alternative he could see was a conciliatory attitude that would have been humiliating and useless. He stole a glance at her now and again, and found it impossible to believe that anything more than a slight misunderstanding was separating them. If he could talk to her for one uninterrupted hour, he was sure——

Lady Adelaide was an unmitigated nuisance during that meal. She had begun now to question him about the American "constitution," and when he attempted an explanation he found that her interest was not in the principles of government, but in the reported weakness of the American digestion.

Tempe had not been so absorbed in her partner's conversation but that she was able to overhear his mistake.

"You are so dreadfully literal, Mr. Grey," she put in maliciously; and this time he had no

answer ready. He knew the application that she intended to convey, but he believed that, though he had erred in every other deduction with reference to her, he had been right in accepting quite literally that confession of her temptation.

He repressed a sigh. I must give her time, he thought, as he turned back to analyse the causes of weakness in the American digestive system.

"They drink gallons of iced water, I've heard," Lady Adelaide was saying.

The remedy of giving Tempe time to discover the truth—as Grey saw it—might have had a chance of success if it had not been for the presence of Eddie Yaxley, a factor that seemed likely to upset all calculations.

For Tempe, with apparent cruelty, was evidently determined not only that her engagement should be announced that night, but also that Grey should see the inevitability of it. She proposed golf after lunch, and pointedly invited him to play.

With the ready gullibility of the man in love, he thought that she was relenting, that she meant, at least, to give him an opportunity to speak to her alone.

"I'll be delighted," he said as carelessly as he was able.

"Good," replied Tempe. "Then we'll have a foursome. We can find some old clubs for you, Eddie."

"All right, old girl," Yaxley agreed good-humouredly. "You know I'm no earthly, of course."

Dickie's inclusion was taken for granted, but when they came to the question of partners he began to raise objections.

"How many are you going to give us?" Tempe asked when they came to the first tee.

"Who's us?" replied Dickie.

"Eddie and I are going to take you on," his sister said.

Dickie surveyed the pair of them with frank contempt. "Two strokes a hole and a bisque, I should think," he suggested.

"Cheeky young beggar!" commented Yaxley.

"Oh, look here, Tempe," Dickie continued, "you'd better play with me. It won't be such a bad match then, if Eddie can hit the ball at all."

Tempe made a face at him. "It's all been arranged, dear little boy," she said. "Now,

do be good. Eddie and I are going to see if we can't lick you at a stroke a hole."

Yaxley's expression was one of perfect complacency.

Dickie shrugged his shoulders as if he was willing to accept for once the boredom of entertaining this foolish couple. It wasn't golf, of course, but——

And even before they reached the first green Grey saw that the game was going to be made unbearable for him.

Tempe was flirting with an openness that made him writhe. He had never seen her in this reckless, exuberant mood, and it hurt him to see with what gusto she could enter into the spirit of it. To all appearance she was foolishly, madly happy.

She hit a fairly good ball from the tee, but Yaxley only moved it a few yards farther when his turn came.

"I say, I'm sorry," he said; "but you know I'm no good at all, and I haven't had a club in my hand for six months."

"Beautiful—it's beautiful!" Tempe exclaimed. "Look what a lovely lie you've given me." And then she wildly sliced her brassie shot into the rough.

Dickie wore an air of bored resignation. "Better let them find it alone," he suggested to his partner.

Grey nodded, and they strolled on in the direction of their own ball.

The finding of Tempe's ball was not a matter of great difficulty, but to get it to the green appeared to be beyond their powers. Grey heard the sound of delighted laughter, and when he looked in their direction Tempe hailed him with a shout. "Seven so far," she called, and held up her hands with three fingers turned down.

Yaxley was evidently entering into the spirit of her mood. "Wait for us," he shouted; "we've got a chance yet."

"Shall we play on alone and leave 'em to it?" asked Dickie.

Grey agreed almost savagely. At that moment he was ready to leave her to her choice for all eternity, if necessary. He wanted only to be out of sight of her, away from the sound of her laughter. She had fooled him, he thought. She had tried to fool him before she had known him five minutes with her silly tricks in Portman Square. He had seen through her then, but now she had her revenge.

She had been too clever for him; she had sized him up, and played to entrap him by pretending a great seriousness. She had guessed that that was his weak point, and now she had scored.

"Oh, yes, for God's sake, let us go on," he said to Dickie.

"Good egg," Dickie replied, and looked up at his partner with something very like admiration.

"Frightful piffle playing golf like that," he said.

Grey nodded. "We'll start from the second tee," he said.

The other pair hailed them once, but Dickie and Grey pretended not to hear, and the hail was not repeated.

3

After that Grey concentrated his attention on the game. He was determined that Tempe should not guess how deeply he was wounded. And all through the afternoon he was steeling himself to meet her again at tea with a composed and careless face, while he did his best to beat Dickie in order that she might not

glory in even the minor triumph of having put him off his game. In the latter object he certainly succeeded. Dickie took his beating with his usual good temper, but as they were walking back to the house he remarked casually that he thought his opponent's handicap ought to be reduced for the Stratton links.

Grey agreed absent-mindedly. He was dreading the ordeal before him, but already he was hardening himself to regard a possible future from which Tempe was completely excluded. He fully expected that her engagement to Yaxley would be announced at tea time.

They were all in the large drawing-room when he and Dickie came in, and the flirtation was being continued. Tempe was still in hilarious spirits, and she and Yaxley were sitting slightly apart from the four other members of the family, who appeared to be deliberately confining their attention to their own group.

"Who won?" Tempe called out, as soon as Grey and Dickie came into the room.

Dickie nodded over his shoulder at Grey. "Going to reduce his handicap for Stratton," he said, as he went over to the tea-table to help himself.

Grey joined the larger group and accepted the services of the footman—he found that he had become curiously oblivious of the presence of servants during his three days in that house. "I shall have become a typical aristocrat by the time I leave here," he thought, and tried to persuade himself that he hoped that time would not be long postponed. Meanwhile he felt that he was playing his part of indifference remarkably well.

Shepston materially helped him by starting a discussion on American literature, and they were quite engrossed when Tempe was suddenly inspired to make a very daring and undiplomatic remark.

"Reggie, dear!" she called out, focusing everyone's attention, "don't you think there is quite a remarkable likeness between Eddie and Mr. Grey?"

Shepston looked round sharply and kept his eyes on her as he said quietly:

"Yes. They might almost be—er—shall we say second cousins?"

Grey saw a faintly scared look come into Tempe's eyes, and there could be no question as to the guiltiness of her blush. She tried to meet her uncle's gaze, but for a moment she

was obviously nonplussed. Then she laughed with the same slightly boisterous gaiety she had displayed all the afternoon. "How ridiculous you are, dear," she said. "Are second cousins ever alike?"

Shepston did not answer. He had turned away from her and had removed and was polishing his eyeglass.

Grey suffered a horrible shiver of doubt. It seemed possible that he would be instantly called upon to explain himself. Shepston knew—that was certain now—and he might have told everything to Lord Downham. Grey looked up prepared, if necessary, to face the music. And he was not ready; he knew in that minute that he wanted much time and consideration before he told his story and made his declaration to all Stratton.

But Lord Downham was placidly sipping his tea and had begun to detail a somewhat wandering anecdote to his wife and Lady Adelaide. He had certainly heard what had been said, but he knew nothing as yet, and his suspicions had evidently not been aroused.

Shepston had replaced his eyeglass, and it was with his habitual bland smile that he said:

"But I find your average American novelist, Grey, still tied to the old romantic tradition."

Grey nodded agreement, but he was not listening. He had found another interpretation of Shepston's audacious comment, and this time he believed the inference was a true one. Yes; Shepston had wanted to find out if Tempe knew. And he had succeeded.

Grey rallied his attention and returned to the discussion on American literature, but he was longing to be out of earshot of Tempe's laugh. It rang false, he thought, laboured and unnatural. She must be conscious that she was not being true to herself.

Shepston soon gave him an opening.

"By the way, you've never seen the picture gallery, have you?" he said.

"No; but I'd very much like to see it," Grey replied, glad of an excuse to escape. He got up at once and carefully avoided any glance in Tempe's direction as he and Shepston left the room.

The picture gallery was, in fact, the ball-room—the finest and least used apartment in the Hall. The lighting was by no means ideal for its present purpose, but the effect of the

room, with its three great fireplaces and its well placed canvases, was splendidly imposing.

"Nothing but portraits of the family," remarked Shepston, "and the majority of those aren't worth twopence. This is the only Reynolds—Lady Stratton, wife of the fifth earl: that was before the creation of the marquisate; and these two Lawrences are Downham's grandmother and grandfather—terrible old buffers, eh? That's the Sargent of Tempe, done last year. Pretty good, eh? Wouldn't think there was so much in the child to hear her carrying on with Yaxley."

"Has the engagement been announced?" Grey asked as casually as he could. The Sargent made his heart ache, for the painter had seen Tempe as he saw her himself: the beautiful face was faintly smiling with the quiet assurance of a woman at ease in any society, but the eyes seemed to be asking some immense question. He tried not to stare at it, but the portrait held him. Looking at it, his confidence began to return. No, she had not fooled him, he thought; she had spoken the truth. He could not doubt her.

"The engagement?" Shepston said. "No, it hasn't been announced, and I very much

doubt if it will be; or, at least, if it is made to-day, as it may possibly be in my little niece's present mood, it will certainly be broken off next week. She doesn't mean to marry him. I have great faith in Tempe."

Grey was embarrassed, but he longed to hear more, or even to hear that comforting assertion repeated. "Faith?" he asked. "In —in what direction?"

"Oh, that's asking too much of me," Shepston returned lightly. "Now, this is a portrait that may interest you," he went on. "The blackest sheep of the Stratton flock, Downham's half-brother, Edward Stratton, the father of that Stratton claimant—I ought to hear who he is to-morrow, by the way, if those confounded editors know, themselves, and will condescend to answer my letters."

Grey stared up at his father's portrait. Perhaps Lord Stratton had been flattered, or perhaps that charming manner of his had fascinated the painter; in any case, there were no signs of criminality in this gentle, kindly face, only the weakness of one who did not know the meaning of self-discipline.

"How old was he when this was done?" Grey asked. He wanted a moment's time to

consider. He had no doubt now that Shepston had brought him here to fulfil a deliberate purpose, to give his visitor a chance to make some statement.

"Twenty-two or -three, I believe," Shepston said. "It was painted some time before he was sent to Canada."

Grey's mind was working quickly. Many things had puzzled him about Shepston that seemed suddenly clear and comprehensible if one astounding hypothesis were made. Was it conceivable that this brilliant little man was not averse to the idea of a possible claimant, if that claimant was in his opinion a desirable master for Stratton? That theory, taken in conjunction with the friendship that had apparently been offered to himself, explained so much.

And with the thought there came to Grey the first tremor of doubt that had ever shaken him. For a moment he saw the whole problem from another standpoint. Might it not after all be better for such as himself to be the minister of these estates than such a man as, say, Dickie, might become? The alternative flashed before him, and was almost instantly refused; but he had, for the first time, considered it.

He looked at Shepston, who was blandly smiling at the portrait of Edward Stratton as if nothing could be farther from his thoughts than the revolutionary plot that had just been imputed to him.

"The point, of course," Grey said, "is whether his marriage was legal."

"Quite," agreed Shepston. "We may say that that is the only point."

"I think not," replied Grey. "It might be also worth while to consider the possibility that the man did not want Stratton."

"Would he be able to resist the temptation in certain circumstances?"

"In any circumstances," Grey said.

Shepston still stared at the portrait of the late Lord Stratton.

"In the present case, however," he said, "your alternative need not be considered, because the claim, according to the *Post* and the *Mail*, is to be made."

"I have a theory about that," Grey replied. "It seems possible to me that those paragraphs were not inspired by the claimant himself, who might, as I have said, be the kind of man who had no sort of use for the title or the money; but some enterprising American

journalist had, perhaps, got hold of the story, and, as he was in London, thought he might try to make his travelling expenses out of the affair."

"But what sort of evidence could a journalist have?"

"Well, so far as we know, the evidence may be uncommonly good and not difficult to concoct. That tutor I've heard of, for example, Hayles, may be still alive, and might have been a witness to the marriage," Grey suggested.

Shepston turned, and for once his formal smile had been smoothed away.

"You cannot deny the possibility that this hypothetical claimant of yours may change his mind," he said keenly; and his eyes searched Grey's face with a steady stare.

"He will not change his mind," Grey said with decision.

"In no circumstances?"

"In no circumstances whatever."

For a moment the two men faced each other in silence, and then Shepston, with a smile that was almost affectionate, took Grey's arm and began to lead him toward the far end of the gallery.

"This portrait of the first earl," he said,

" is by a pupil of Vandyck's; it is the only one of the earlier period that was saved from the old Hall. You see the corner of the frame is charred. The light is rather bad now. You must come again in the morning. You will be staying for another week at least, I suppose?"

Grey hesitated. "For another three or four days, perhaps," he said.

4

That night he stood for a long time by the open window of his bedroom.

After dinner he had spent more than an hour in Lord Downham's study over the promised discussion on Canadian affairs. Shepston had been present, and had guided the conversation. He had asked all the essential questions, but invariably with a certain indirectness. His sentences had begun with "Lord Downham wishes to know——" or "Lord Downham has been asking me——". There had been an air of a state function about the whole interview, with Shepston in the part of a privileged secretary. Through it all Lord Downham had maintained his dignity and the effect of being perfectly conversant with the

subject in hand. When he interrupted Shepston, or asked a question on his own account, he was sure of his ground. But Grey inferred that the silences which marked the vicarious interrogatories were evidence of a well-concealed ignorance; and the silences had been many.

He is a figurehead, but with the powers of an autocrat, Grey decided in the quiet of his own bedroom. Stratton is a kind of grand duchy with a ruler just clever enough to recognise his own limitations and defer to the wisdom of his viceregent.

He recognised now that he was in danger. He had come at last to a consideration of the question that he had hitherto regarded as no question.

No doubt Tempe had been largely responsible. She had dropped her vivacity after Yaxley had gone off in his car after dinner; but she had treated Grey with a careless ease that in no way singled him out as a person deserving of any particular attention, and she had cleverly avoided any possibility of being left alone with him. And when they had all been in the drawing-room together for a few moments, before he had gone to his state interview, she had announced to the company in

general: "Sorry I've got nothing to tell you. Eddie didn't come to the point, after all. I expect he forgot what it was he came over for. Perhaps he was worried about the mare."

Grey had felt that the announcement was certainly meant for him not less than for her own people. She had drawn away from him for a time, but if he could read her message it was that she cared for him—well enough, perhaps, to marry him if he could give her the position she was determined to keep. There had been, he thought, a new look of hard resolution about her eyes that night, as if she had fought and definitely conquered all temptations to face experience, as if she had for ever closed her ears to the call that bade her renounce wealth and rank for the sake of her soul.

He had tried to persuade himself that he was repelled and disgusted by that decision, that she was no longer worthy of admiration. But here in the silence he was honest with himself; he knew that no ethical tests nor any consideration of Tempe's attitude towards life had any effect upon his feeling for her. If she married Yaxley, and if she narrowed and hardened in the course of years, Grey knew that he would still love her as he did now.

There was some indefinable bond between them, he was sure of that; but something within him, something that he was inclined to regard as almost unworthy, cried out furiously against the possibility of Tempe's marriage with anyone but himself. He tried to reason away his jealousy, but it was too strong for him. He could not endure the thought that she could give anything of herself to another man.

And yet, if he persisted in his present attitude, was any other alternative possible? Inevitably she would marry. She was so full of eager life; she must find some expression.

For a time he dared, with a recognisable consciousness of temerity, to consider the whole problem with a new detachment of mind. He tried to regard himself as holding Stratton in trust for the people. What power he would have! What opportunities for the spreading of his gospel!

The thought began to take hold of him; he became constructive, planning the means of his propaganda. There was an education scheme he had built up, and still hoped one day to test if he could find some wealthy enthusiast to finance it. That scheme might be carried out at once and on a practical scale if he

stretched out his hand and took his own. And he would have a seat in the House of Lords, and might in time exert enough influence there to form the nucleus of a new party. The majority of the members of that House were, no doubt, beyond the reach of any influence, but there were a few who might, perhaps, follow him.

He was pacing up and down the room, warm with a new enthusiasm, when he caught sight of the photograph of his mother that he always carried with him and had now put out on his dressing-table. He stopped his walk abruptly, lifted the photograph, and gazed at it intently under the white glare of the bunched electric lamps that hung over the looking-glass. And for the first time in his life he seemed to see the marks of prejudice, of a provincial narrowness, in that sweet, intent face. She only knew one side, he thought; she was so horribly biased by the weakness of that unhappy fool, his father. Those two parents of his had never had a chance—one had seen the face of the coin, and the other the reverse; while he, their son, could compare both images.

He made no decision that night, but he permitted his mind to dwell on the conception

of himself as a kind of mediator between rank and the people. He held that figure with a stern resolution as the only condition of possible recantation. He did not dare to contemplate the thought that his love for Tempe had been a predominant factor in the process.

5

Shepston came into the breakfast-room at nine o'clock the next morning with a newspaper in his hand. He looked unusually grave and somewhat preoccupied.

"That damned journalist friend of yours has been at it again," he remarked.

"Hell!" murmured Grey. "What paper is it?"

"One of those Sunday editions," Shepston said, "that condense all the crime and scandal of the week, preferably emphasising the disreputable. This copy was probably sent by your friend. We don't take it in as a rule, you know. It was addressed to Downham."

"Has he seen it?" Grey asked.

"Indeed he has," Shepston returned grimly.

"Have they printed the whole story?"

"Oh, read it for yourself," Shepston said, "and then we can talk."

Grey took the paper offered to him. It was folded to display one of its inner pages, the whole of which was devoted to the sensation. The headlines were reasonably explicit. "Who is the Marquis?" was the first, and below: "Unknown Canadian claims Wealth and Honour. Great Peerage Threatened."

Grey plunged, frowning, into the body of the article. It had named no one, but Stratton was so clearly indicated as to be unmistakable. Devonshire was mentioned, and Portman Square, and one sentence contained dreadful puns on the family's two titles.

Fellowes' hand was recognisable throughout, restrained, however, by the timidity of the London editor. The article began with a résumé of a few historical cases from Tichborne to the Poulett organ-grinder, and then the facts of Edward Stratton's career were set out in full: his early peccadilloes, his visit to Canada, his marriage, and his return to die in Devonshire. The next column took up the story of Grey's mother, describing in some detail her struggles to make a livelihood, her hatred of the man who had disgraced her, and her attitude

toward his family. Then Grey's achievements were referred to, including a mention of his book, the subject of which was epitomised, although the title of it was withheld. The article finished with rather an able piece of rhetoric which was designed to enlist the sympathy of the reader on behalf of the claimant.

Grey sighed and looked up. "No names given," he said. "But I suppose Lord Downham has guessed that I——"

Shepston shook his head. "That escaped him altogether," he remarked, "as it might also escape my sister; but if Lady Adelaide or Tempe——"

"Lady Tempe knows," Grey interrupted.

"Ah! I thought that was possible," commented Shepston. He paused for a moment, and then went on: "But the important point at present is how I am to relieve poor Downham's mind. He's badly hipped. Your friend has a most convincing manner, and I'm not at all sure that Downham isn't afraid that there really is some truth in the story. That Canadian visit has always been a trifle—er—Damoclean. In a sense, I think this stuff has come rather as confirming an old dread than as a sudden surprise. The blow was a little broken

by those earlier paragraphs." Shepston stopped and surveyed his companion thoughtfully, but as Grey made no comment, he continued:

"If I may put it this way, Downham is just now much in the state of mind of a man who has good reason to believe that he has a —a foreign growth somewhere in his body. He wants, naturally, to get expert advice as soon as possible—suspense is the one unendurable thing. And, if I can sum up his feelings, I should say that he sees three alternatives. The first is that the growth is malignant, and that no operation is feasible; that the claimant, in fact, is an impossible person from Downham's point of view, and that the case is unassailable. The second is that an operation promises some hope; that the claimant might be in some ways acceptable and might, perhaps, be willing to make some kind of reasonable concession."

He stopped again and marked this second alternative by a short pause before he concluded: "The third, of course, is that there is no growth, no claimant; that it's all a fizzle. Only, how is one to put him out of suspense?"

Grey got up and walked to the window. He wanted to hide his face from the shrewd gaze of the little man on the hearthrug. He

was so puzzled to guess what precisely was Shepston's game. Again the inference appeared to be that he wanted his brother-in-law to be deposed—surely an incredible supposition. But why had he paused so unmistakably to emphasise that second alternative? Was he hanging out a bait to tempt his fish into some, as yet invisible, net?

Grey dismissed that perplexity as something that was beyond his powers of comprehension, and tried to consider the hardly less intricate question of how Lord Downham's suspense might be relieved. The morning had brought cooler judgment, and in any case Grey felt that he could not just now have discovered his identity to the family. That Sunday paper had cut the ground away from him for the moment, had made the whole affair vulgar, essentially commonplace.

He came back into the room, and, leaning on the edge of the table, confronted Shepston, who had been silently waiting, standing patiently with his back to the empty fireplace.

"Can't you pretend some private information that would put Lord Downham's mind at rest?" Grey asked.

Shepston's right eyebrow lifted interroga-

tively; his left maintained its steadfast hold of his monocle. "No need to pretend," he remarked. "I've got it; but he won't accept vague ambiguities. He wants certainty."

"That, unhappily, he can't very well have," Grey replied.

"No?" inquired Shepston.

"Well, how can he?"

"There's the available truth, you know," Shepston said. "Nice, honest sort of thing the truth, when you can use it—which, unfortunately, isn't often."

"Impossible," muttered Grey.

Shepston's eyebrow rose a little farther, giving him a curiously impish look.

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, you must see that for yourself!" Grey said impatiently. "If the family believed me, they would, to say the least of it, be in a most damnably equivocal position."

"You think that their—sense of justice, shall we say?—might influence them to insist on your wearing their laurels?"

"Their sense of family might."

"And you feel that their insistence might be unpleasant for you?"

"In a way, yes."

"Er—what do you suppose you would do in those circumstances?"

Grey shrugged his shoulders. "You can't force a title or a fortune on a man who doesn't want it, I suppose," he said. "In any case I could always run away."

"Yes, you might run away," Shepston agreed lightly. "You might also marry, and further complicate the problem by begetting sons who might not be willing to subscribe to their father's altruistic principles."

"I shouldn't marry," Grey said.

Shepston smiled blandly. "Oh, but that's one of the things a man never knows!" he remarked. "I have heard so many quiet resolutions made to that effect, and yet——" He waved his hand with a gesture that intimated how easily those resolutions were afterwards dissipated. "You must admit, Grey," he added, "that the situation is considerably complicated. Your refusal by no means covers the whole ground."

This was an aspect of the problem that Grey had never considered, but he saw instantly that the fact of his potential fatherhood was a very essential one. Moreover, it might possibly explain to a certain extent Shepston's apparent

willingness to admit the rights of the present heir rather than to risk the possibly ruthless claim of a younger generation.

"Couldn't I make some legal abdication?" Grey asked.

"On your own behalf, you might; but not on behalf of those possible sons of yours."

"I would undertake never to let them know."

"By killing off all the journalists or destroying the registers?"

"It's a thousand to one chance——"

"And what do you calculate must have been the odds against your staying here at the very time that your journalist friend discovered your identity? No, my dear Grey, it's so commonly the altogether outside chances that come off."

"Well, what is it you want me to do?"

"Oh, I?" Shepston said. "Really, you know, it is only quite incidentally any affair of mine. I am merely an ambassador, or hardly that. You must regard me as nothing more than a secretary."

"Even a secretary has the power to make a suggestion."

"Not in this case," Shepston replied. "I

understand my function here to be confined to the statement of facts. My own opinions must obviously — you surely agree with me? — be subordinated."

Grey nodded. He realised now how equivocal was Shepston's position, and at the same time how skilfully he seemed to be guiding the issue.

For two or three minutes neither man spoke, and then Shepston said:

"Am I to understand, then, that you refuse to—er—to come up to Downham at present?"

"Oh, definitely!" Grey replied on the spur of the moment.

Shepston looked at his watch. "It's an infernally difficult job having to accommodate myself to two Lord Downhams," he remarked casually; and then went on quickly: "Oh, by the way, do you mind coming to church? We all go on Sunday morning to the village. It's another of Downham's traditions. But visitors are permitted to absent themselves. If you have any conscientious objections——"

"I shall be glad to come," Grey said.

"Good," replied Shepston. "The big car will be round in half an hour or so. There will

only be six of us. Lady Adelaide has a peculiar religion of her own that goes with her gastric theories. We used to drive behind a pair of horses—it seemed in a way more substantial—but Dickie and Tempe have vetoed that."

6

Some of the old feeling of revolt, almost of indignation, came back to Grey as he motored with the rest of the party down to the parish church of Cole-Stratton. The formality of the whole proceeding evoked the same spirit of criticism that had been called out when he had been met by the two flunkeys at the station a few days before. He recognised again the arrogant attitude of the ruling aristocrat in his manner of attending morning service.

Lord Downham himself (he was dressed in a black morning-coat with a white slip under his waistcoat), in assuming the expression he deemed proper to the occasion, had put on an air of slightly self-conscious dignity. It was evident that any honour he might have won in public life was won by him chiefly for Stratton. It was Stratton that occupied the first place in his thoughts. He was an important figure

everywhere, but at Stratton he was the supreme figure.

The others in their separate ways were not less arrogant. Lady Downham was obviously thinking of something else. Grey would not have been at all surprised if she had leaned forward and begun that long-deferred discussion on Socialism. Tempe and Dickie made no attempt to conceal their boredom. To them the congregation of the village church was absolutely negligible.

Grey wondered, with a shiver of dread, if they would all make some kind of state procession up the nave; he deemed it not altogether improbable that, if service had not begun, the congregation would rise at their entrance. But he was spared that ordeal. The family that had a private waiting-room on the railway station had also a private chapel in the parish church. The north transept was theirs, screened and remote, and they entered it as they might have come into the back of the royal box at the opera. (Dickie did not take off his hat until he had sat down.) The common herd in nave or chancel must peer through a close tracery of woodwork, if it desired—as it obviously did desire—any glimpse of its over-

lord, his family, or his guests. They had their private apartment even in the church; that carved oak screen utterly separated them from all that was not Stratton.

The very furniture of the private chapel was differentiated from that which serves the ordinary worshipper. The seats were separate and easily movable. It is true that the design of them had an ecclesiastical turn, but they were far more like arm-chairs than the usual church seating. Stratton took its devotions in physical comfort, condescending to use the same building as the rest of the congregation, but by its isolation arrogating to itself a freedom from all ordinary usages. Dickie, for instance, quietly disappeared during the Litany, and Grey had no doubt that he had gone out to smoke a cigarette in the churchyard. Indeed, Lord Downham was the only one of the party who religiously followed the service and obeyed the suggestions of the rubric as to the propriety of sitting, kneeling, or standing on specific occasions.

It was all horribly distasteful to Grey. He had come into the presence of humanity, and was shut off from his kind as if he were a superior creation. Once he found himself

planning a new form of attendance, with himself in the part of marquis; a decently quiet entrance to the back of the nave, taking his chance of a vacant seat. He put the picture away from him impatiently, less because he had for a moment thought of himself as lord of Stratton than because he saw that, however sincere his attempt at humility, he would inevitably be regarded with the same awe that was now directed to Lord Downham in this secluded apartment of his. How the schoolchildren would nudge each other, blush, and edge away if the lord of Stratton elected to sit among them! And the people, the parson and his wife, the tenants, the little shopkeepers, the villagers, all would resent any attempt to treat them as equals. They were trained in this respect for the aristocracy; it was one of the essential facts of their life. Without question they would deplore the coming of any marquis who failed to maintain in any degree his state and dignity. No; Grey could not see himself in that part.

He looked across at Tempe. He had tried not to stare at her during the service, but twice before he had caught her eye—she seemed to know when he was watching her. On each

occasion she had made a little grimace to express her boredom, but there had been no suggestion of intimacy in that exchange of glances. She had that impertinent, slightly supercilious air she had worn in Portman Square; she had patronised him by her acknowledgment of his presence. He could only interpret her grimace as an indication that she had not changed her mind.

But this time, although he knew that she was quite conscious of his regard, she did not look in his direction. She was dressed in white that morning, and, seen against the background of the pale blue marble dado that encircled the walls of the chapel up to the high sills of the windows, her dark head and warm colour stood out sharply beautiful in the soft light pouring down from the nave clerestory through the pointed arch that rose above the screen.

He found it so hard to believe that he was separated from her by an abyss of misunderstanding and diversity of purpose. He felt in his heart that she was still the perfect friend and lover he had so suddenly found and so abruptly lost. Surely, if he could speak to her, he would be able to reach her again? For a day they had shared such wonderful confidences.

And then he forced himself to realise that indeed there was no bond between them outside his own imagination, that he must soon go away and leave her to marry the future Duke of Liverpool, and that she would in all probability have entirely forgotten himself in a very few days' time, or, remembering him, would think of him only to be thankful that she had escaped the consequences of a foolish and quite ephemeral impulse. He set his teeth hard and tried to face that lonely future of his as a man might steel himself to face a dangerous operation that, even if successful, would certainly cripple his life.

He became aware that she was moving restlessly in her upholstered church-seat. Her colour had deepened, and she was frowning impatiently.

He wondered if his thought had in some way reached her; if she were trying to frown back the voice that told her her life was unworthy?

And when she at last turned and looked at him her face was hard and defiant. She stared at him haughtily, tacitly rebuking him for the rudeness of his persistent gaze. He did not drop his eyes, and after a brief struggle of wills

—it was as real an opposition to them as if they had been engaged in a spoken argument or even a physical encounter—she turned her chair right round, and for the remainder of the service sat with her back to him.

Grey, released from his preoccupation, became suddenly aware that he was in the presence of four other persons. But Lord Downham was conscientiously listening to the sermon, his wife was comfortably asleep, and Dickie was intently pushing the little red hassock about the floor with his feet, no doubt planning a new arrangement of the Stratton golf course. Shepston alone appeared to have witnessed the momentous duel that had just taken place; and, if his expression gave any clue to his thoughts, he had found cause for profound meditation in that clash of opposing purposes.

There was a collection after the sermon, and the spruce churchwarden came first to the Stratton chapel. He entered by the door in the screen, immediately closing it after him to shut out the inquisitive peering of the common crowd in the body of the church. When he was inside he bowed once, formally, to the occupants of the chapel, advanced to Lord

Downham, received a bank-note on his plate, and retired again without approaching any other member of the family. The marquis represented the house. He gave generously to the offertory on behalf of all who might be at Stratton, whether his own people or visitors.

After he had made his contribution, Lord Downham bowed his head gravely for a few seconds, and then turned to his family. They did not wait for the close of the service—for the last verse of the offertory hymn and the vicar's blessing—but went quietly out by their private door to the waiting motor, and were out of the village long before the remainder of the congregation streamed into the churchyard.

But through all his condemnation of the method of such churchgoing as this, Grey recognised some kind of an attitude that compelled his admiration. There was no display about these Stratton traditions. They made no attempt to win adulation or even respect. For just as no member of that family would have troubled to draw his attention to the effigies and memorial tablets that commemorated the remains of that long line of Strattons who were

buried in the vaults below the chapel, so all the dignities of their position were taken for granted in their appearance before the world. They had no occasion to insist upon their place and power, no need to resort to any kind of ostentation, and they were so perfectly unconscious of being anything but just themselves.

7

Grey hoped that some chance of being alone with Tempe might offer itself between lunch and dinner. He was trying that day to nerve himself to a recognition of the fact that her ways and his lay apart, but he was determined to speak to her once more before he accepted his fate. No opportunity was given him, however. She disappeared after lunch, and, after refusing Dickie's challenge to golf on the new handicap terms, he wandered moodily about the house and the park until tea time.

Shepston also was not to be found, and Grey wondered if he had yet discovered some means of allaying his brother-in-law's misgivings.

Certainly there was no sign of uneasiness among the family when they met for tea in

the smaller drawing-room. Shepston particularly seemed in the best of spirits, and the greater part of his conversation was devoted to discussing when some public announcement could be made of Tempe's engagement to Eddie Yaxley.

"It's all very well, my dear girl," Shepston said in answer to a petulant expostulation of Tempe's that no engagement existed between her and Eddie; "but we all know that the mere formality of a proposal is unnecessary in this case. You've been engaged to him to all intents and purposes since he was at Christ Church. I remember that I found him kissing you when you were fifteen."

"My dear Reggie, what rot!" Tempe replied. "It doesn't follow that I want to marry him now."

Shepston cocked up his disengaged eyebrow. "You surely don't mean that you're going to back out of it?" he asked.

"Really, I don't know," Tempe said peevishly. "I wish to goodness you'd talk about something else."

"But, Tempe dear, I thought it was practically settled," her mother put in.

And Lord Downham, making the one allu-

sion that passed with reference to the subject of the claimant, added half jocosely, "I certainly think you'd better—er—secure your position as soon as possible."

"Well, hadn't one of you better write to Eddie and ask him his intentions?" Tempe said. "He's going to Scotland to-morrow morning, and it really doesn't seem necessary to consult me in any way. Here I am for you to dispose of."

"I don't see why we shouldn't write," remarked Shepston gravely; and Lord and Lady Downham, who had been ready to treat Tempe's suggestion as a piece of characteristic foolishness, immediately took it up in all seriousness.

"I don't see why we shouldn't," Lord Downham agreed. "Personally, I have, as you know, Tempe, a great wish that you should marry Yaxley."

Tempe looked round as if she were suddenly a little harassed by the importunities that were besetting her. For a moment she hesitated as if she were trying to find some loophole of escape, and then she shrugged her shoulders and said: "Very well, do write, if you think you can do it decently."

"I think I can manage that," Shepston said a little grimly.

And not till then did Grey guess that Shepston was still intent upon his original purpose, the full meaning of which was to be so amazingly made clear that evening.

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTBURST

1

THERE could be no doubt that a storm was coming up. As they sat at dinner, with the windows wide open, they could hear the distant grumble of thunder far away. The air was very still and close, and the oppression of it had affected every member of the party. Lady Downham was unusually quiet; she continually leaned back in her chair and shut her eyes as if the glare of the electric light hurt her. Her husband was unquestionably irritable, and when Lady Adelaide began to criticise the tenets of the English Church he stopped her at once by saying that he would not permit the subject to be discussed. Dickie also suffered a sharp reproof for perpetually fidgeting with the silver and glass. After that Lady Adelaide and Dickie both sulked. Shepston was distrait; his smile was less in evidence, and once or twice he frowned as if debating some question of con-

siderable complexity. Tempe alone was determined to talk. The coming storm seemed to be unduly exciting her.

"I should like to be on South Hill now," she said, with a suggestion of rapture in her voice.

"Get jolly wet," mumbled Dickie.

"I wonder if it's too late," she went on. "Think how one would see the lightning behind the tors, and then the rain coming across the valley!"

Grey tried to catch her eye. He was ready to go with her if she would give him the smallest encouragement. But Lord Downham, whether because he suspected the proposal of so unconventional an adventure or simply because he was in a bad humour, cut in by saying:

"Don't be so absurd, Tempe; South Hill would not be at all a safe place in a thunderstorm."

"Of course it wouldn't," Tempe returned. "But I don't want to be in a safe place. I'm tired of safe places."

Her father frowned and fidgeted. "Absurd—quite absurd," he muttered.

"I should like to stand on the hill and let

the lightning play all round me," Tempe persisted.

"Well, why don't you?" grumbled her brother.

"Will you come with me?" she replied quickly.

"Rather not," Dickie said. "I don't see any sport in getting beastly wet, with the off-chance of being struck by lightning."

"I understand the attraction of it," Grey put in. "I've watched storms in the Rockies. It gives one a sense of power, of being a part of Nature."

Tempe turned then and met his eyes at last, but her own were cold and hard.

"I suppose our poor little English thunder-storms seem very miniature affairs to you?" she said.

"I haven't seen one yet," he replied.

"Would you care to walk to South Hill?" she asked.

"Certainly; I should enjoy it," Grey said; but she did not answer him.

"Damn foolishness," Lady Adelaide remarked very distinctly; "shows your stomach's out of order."

Lady Downham had her eyes shut as if she

were trying to picture herself in the midst of the storm and herself a part of Nature.

A flash of lightning more vivid than any that had preceded it suddenly glared over the park, and they all sat silent for a few seconds waiting for the thunder. When it came, still appreciably distant, Lord Downham made a sign to Garton to close the windows, and, when that had been done, to draw down the blinds.

"Pity! I'm afraid it's too late," Tempe said. "I shall have to watch it from the terrace."

Her father threw a sharp, annoyed glance at her, but he did not speak.

Grey was wondering whether he, too, might be privileged to watch the storm from the terrace. Tempe had certainly snubbed him, but he could appreciate her mood, and he believed that, given the opportunity, he could find a way to appeal to her this evening. Perhaps he might offer to play billiards with Dickie, and excuse himself as soon as they were out of the drawing-room?

Lady Downham opened her eyes and looked round the table. "Have we all finished?" she asked, and got up without waiting for an answer. Dickie was already smoking.

As they were following her across the hall Shepston caught Grey up and took him by the arm.

"We are all in alarmingly bad tempers," Shepston said, "and it isn't only the storm. Lady Adelaide had been badgering Downham about this claimant affair. Most unfortunately she got hold of the paper—I'm afraid I must have left it about somewhere—and, being in a spiteful mood, she thought fit to ask him what steps he was going to take about it. That was why she got snubbed at dinner; but, if I know her at all, she'll take her revenge, and Downham knows it, too; but — he's singularly obstinate in some ways—he means, I think, to face it and—well, to discuss the whole thing quite frankly."

The others had gone on into the drawing-room, but Shepston kept Grey back.

"I'm afraid all this may be a little awkward for you," he said.

"Perhaps I'd better not come in," Grey suggested. He thought he saw a way now to obtain his desire. And then he pictured himself waiting alone on the terrace and Tempe snugly chuckling at him in the drawing-room.

"Or, if I came in for a few minutes, I

might get out to play billiards or watch the storm," he added. "I could surely find an excuse to absent myself from a—a private family discussion?"

Shepston nodded. "That might be better," he said.

2

The heavy tapestry curtains were drawn across the five great windows, and the drawing-room shone in the soft illumination of the concealed lights, but the oppression of the storm was there as an almost visible presence. The many flowers and plants filled the room with an unusually heavy scent, as though they, tender exotics as they were, expanded to meet the coming rain. Involuntarily, Grey looked at the windows and wished that he could tear back the curtains and throw open the French casements, could let in some breath of sweet, fresh wind to blow away this air of dread and expectation.

He accepted coffee automatically from Garton, and then stood a little apart from the others. He would not look at Tempe. He had solicited her attention at dinner and been re-

pulsed; now he must await his opportunity and compel her to listen to him.

She was leaning back in the corner of a settee, smoking a cigarette with absorbed attention. She was wearing a gay dress to-night, a dress that he had not seen before, one that had a spiral motive of flame-coloured silk from which her head and shoulders emerged as from an obedient fire. It represented, he thought, a mood of recklessness, yet it suited her—but all her dresses did that; she was unquestionably an artist in expressing the shades of her rich personality through the medium of her clothes. Dress was for her, as she had implied, an outlet for her creative ability.

Dickie was mooning about in the neighbourhood of the doorway into the hall, obviously awaiting an opportunity to get to his game. The other three, joined now by Shepston, made a fairly compact group about one of the Chippendale tables.

Lady Downham, apparently relieved to have left the dining-room, was talking platitudes about the effect of the storm. Her husband listened politely, but he wore an anxious frown as if he were preparing himself for an unpleasant experience that was surely coming; while Lady

Adelaide, sipping a liqueur, wore a resolute expression of eager vindictiveness.

"Oh, my dear Caroline," she broke in suddenly, interrupting Lady Downham's third repetition of the obvious, "we all know perfectly well that it will be cooler when the rain comes."

"It's a relief to talk about it," Lady Downham explained.

Lady Adelaide snorted violently. "It would be a relief to me if you'd tell me what you're all going to do," she said.

"Nothing," put in her nephew curtly.

"Nothing?" Lady Adelaide repeated. "You don't mean to tell me that you're quietly going to let some American humbug blackmail you—for I suppose that's what it'll come to?"

Lord Downham grunted impatiently. "Er—er——" he began, and then pushed back his chair and held up his hand as if to prevent Shepston from helping him. "Er—you don't seem to understand, my dear aunt, to grasp the situation. There can't in any case be any—any question of blackmail——"

He was going on, but Tempe interrupted him by jumping up from her settee and saying:

"Goodness, if you're going into all this I'll say good night."

"We can very well spare you," her father replied.

Tempe made a *moue* and bowed elaborately to the group by the table. She was going towards the door when Lady Adelaide said sharply: "Don't you know that this concerns you too, little idiot, or do you think *you're* safe?"

"Pretty safe, aunt," Tempe said gaily, paused a moment, and then added, "but, darling, I really don't believe Fletchering *does* agree with you."

Lady Adelaide was not at all offended. "Feather-head," she remarked, waved her great-niece away, and returned to the attack with new virulence. "Well, Edward, you were going to explain," she said.

Tempe spoke to Dickie by the door, and they both left the room together.

Grey's attention wandered from the conversation that had now begun again with a feeble gust of bickering between Lord Downham and his aunt. He was listening for the sound of the hall door, trying to hear whether Tempe had carried out the intention she had

expressed at dinner. But no sound reached him of any movement outside the room. In any case he must take his chance now, he decided. He had a good excuse for leaving the drawing-room, even if the other occupants noticed his going, a very unlikely contingency.

He was still holding his coffee-cup, and he moved a little away and set it down on the table. The rest of the manœuvre was quite simple, and he had reached the door when a single word of the conversation, a word spoken in a raised voice, snatched his attention:

"Harlot!"

He had heard, he thought, only that single word, but as he hesitated, with his fingers on the door handle, he remembered the sentence that had preceded it. The sound of it seemed to be still ringing in his ears: "The son of some Canadian harlot."

He looked back along the room and saw Shepston put out his hand with a quick gesture of disapproval.

"No, no, Lady Adelaide," he said.

"No?" replied the old lady, in her high, penetrating voice. "Have you got some particular information, then? If so, let's have it, in God's name, my good Reginald."

Shepston frowned and shook his head. He kept his eyes away from the door, but he was certainly aware that Grey had not yet left the room.

Lady Adelaide shrugged her shoulders. "Then why negative my eminently reasonable suggestion?" she said. "What's more likely than that Edward should have had a child by some gutter wench in Toronto? It was just the sort of thing he did do, poor silly fool."

Grey forgot Tempe and the storm on the terrace. That conversation round the spindle-legged table in this splendid room was his affair. That foul-mouthed old lady was heaping terrible insults upon his mother. The old lady was innocent of any particular intention, but her inferences were those that would be canvassed and probably adopted by the world at large. She and Fellowes between them had started a scandal that was horribly maligning the memory of the woman who had sacrificed her life for himself.

He could not stop to reason just then. He saw a vision of his mother's sweet, earnest face, and he felt as if this old harridan had struck and defiled it.

And as he walked back unhurriedly to the

farther end of the room, his mind refused the thought of anything but this one insult. He was incapable of considering what might be the far-reaching results of his interference. He thought not at all of Tempe or the Stratton inheritance. He saw nothing but a picture of his mother's face branded and disfigured.

The discussion round the table was becoming more heated. The three Strattons were evidently oblivious of the presence of anyone but themselves. But Shepston had pushed his chair back and was polishing his eyeglass. For so peculiarly confident and able a diplomatist, he looked uncommonly ill at ease.

Grey came up and laid his hand on Lady Adelaide's shoulder.

"I'll ask you to stop talking, and listen to me," he said gravely.

He had a strangely intent look on his face, as if his gaze were fixed on some near figure that was quite invisible to the others.

8

Lady Adelaide looked up with an expression of shocked surprise.

"Eh?" she said, and made a movement to

release her naked shoulder from the grip of his fingers.

Lord and Lady Downham were apparently too startled to speak. They sat aghast and stared as if they were witnessing some awful but enthralling dramatic performance.

Outside the storm was coming nearer. A long reverberating peal rolled on and on as if it would never cease.

Grey released his grip, and the marks of his fingers showed red on Lady Adelaide's white skin.

"I've got to make you understand," he said.

"What in God's name are you talking about, young man?" asked Lady Adelaide; and Lord Downham, relieved from the spell that the shock had put upon him, began his usual grunting prelude to speech.

"Er—er—this is—er——" he stuttered.

Grey took no sort of notice of him. He was trying to find some means of making his intention extraordinarily plain. He had a wild impulse to go upstairs and fetch his mother's photograph from the dressing-table.

"Listen, listen, woman! Don't interrupt me," he said, and made an impatient gesture with his hand.

Lady Adelaide winced and moved her chair farther away from him.

"You were speaking of Edward Stratton," Grey said, "and the woman he married in Canada. And you used certain epithets that you are going to apologise for."

Lord Downham suddenly became articulate. "I must protest," he began. "This is—is most unseemly. Really, I can't allow——"

Grey turned and looked at him.

"I must ask you not to interrupt me, Lord Downham," he said. "What I have to say is very important."

"Er—really, really——" Lord Downham protested angrily, but with a suggestion of nervous uneasiness.

His wife still stared fixedly at Grey; her mouth was perceptibly open.

Shepston had stood up, and was tilting his chair towards him, holding it by the back rail.

"We must hear what Mr. Grey has to say," he put in, with an air of authority. "You were speaking of the woman the late Lord Stratton met in Toronto, I think," he continued. "You say he married her?"

"Why, of course," Grey said. "But that's of no importance. I'll allow it was an import-

ant thing to her, because she had fine ideals of virtue and morality. But it's not that I'm wanting to insist on at this moment. No; what I have to make clear to you is just the kind of woman Janet Grey was."

Lady Adelaide snorted. "Janet Grey!" she repeated. "A relative of yours, young man?"

"She was my mother," Grey said.

How utterly unsuspicious of that fact these three people had been was proved by the frozen amazement with which they greeted his announcement. They made no dramatic movements; they simply stared at Grey as if they were uncertain whether they had rightly understood him. Lady Adelaide was the first to find speech.

"Eh?" she ejaculated in a thin squeak.

Grey's automatic repetition of his statement was probably not heard by any of his listeners, for at that moment a great fork of lightning glared so blindingly outside, that the brilliance of it flashed into the room through the crevices between the curtain rings and through every slit where the curtains themselves just failed to meet. And with that intimidating blaze one devastating crash of thunder burst like a vast

explosion, as if the whole of Stratton Hall had been awfully shattered into one instantaneous ruin.

The two women blenched and shrieked, and both Lord Downham and Shepston unconsciously ducked their heads and closed their eyes.

"Dear me," Lord Downham said, recovering himself while still the din of that crash rang in all their ears. "I don't know when I've known such a storm. I wonder if anything was struck?" He got up, walked to the window, parted the curtains, and looked out.

Grey stood quite still. He seemed hardly to have noticed the thunder. He was waiting patiently to make his explanation.

Lady Adelaide had begun to chatter about the storm to Lady Downham, when her husband dropped the curtains and returned to the group about the table.

"I hope Tempe isn't out on the terrace," he said quietly; and then to Grey: "You were saying, I believe, that you claim to be—er—the son of the late Lord Stratton?"

Lady Adelaide turned round and put up her lorgnette. "Ah, yes," she remarked. "Please go on."

The whole atmosphere of the room had changed. It was as if that culminating crash had relieved all the tension. The Strattons had providentially been given an opportunity to recover their sangfroid at this most critical and astounding moment of their lives.

"I'd like you to know the kind of woman my mother was," said Grey, with no apparent consciousness of the interruption or of the change of attitude expressed by his hearers; "and I realise that you'll find it mighty hard to understand, because you'd never meet a woman of that sort in your own society. You see, she was truly great. She had the purest mind and the biggest heart ever woman had, and she was so revolted and disgusted when she learned the kind of man she had married that she brought me up to loathe the name of Stratton. She had no false pride either; it was just that she loved things that were clean and honest. And she worked all her life to give me such a chance in the world that I would never want to take or claim money I had not earned. I have never respected any other human being as I respect her. She has been my hero ever since I could remember. I've her photograph in my room upstairs, and I'd like you to see it;

I think it might help you to understand something of what I'm telling you."

He paused, and Lady Adelaide opened her mouth to speak, and then closed it again. The quiet sincerity and intensity of Grey's speech had subdued even her temper.

It was Lady Downham who broke the silence. "Will you ring, Reggie," she said, "and ask Garton to fetch the photograph from Mr. Grey's room?"

Her husband nodded gravely. It seemed, absurdly, that the photograph was to be produced as evidence.

4

THEY had listened to him attentively, they had even shown signs of having been impressed by his simple devotion to the memory of his mother; but now, while Garton was away on his errand, they gave him clearly to understand that if they had been tricked into a grudging admiration for his filial reverence, they were by no means prepared to accept his story or himself at his own valuation. They had become more formal, more polite than Grey had ever seen them.

"I suppose you don't remember your father?" asked Lady Adelaide, with a notably cynical inflection.

"He deserted my mother a few weeks after he married her," Grey said. He had vindicated his mother's memory, and his sense of realities was coming back to him. For a few minutes, while that strange passionate heat of determination had held him, these people had appeared dwarfed, almost infantile. He had regarded them as little, ignorant children who must be punished for their naughtiness, and he had controlled his temper in order to administer a more telling rebuke. Now he was beginning to see them again in their true relation to himself: as his host and hostess, and as aristocrats who counted in the social and political life of England, whatever might be his own contempt for the system that had given them their power. Lastly, with a sudden flush of emotion that surged through him like warm blood returning freely to half-starved veins, he remembered that these two people were Tempe's father and mother. For a moment his problem took a new shape. It seemed to him that he must either persist in his claim or acknowledge that he had lied; either deny his own and his

mother's principles, or asperse her memory and relinquish all hope of Tempe.

"Indeed?" Lord Downham was saying. "And—and Edward, I understand, had made no—no provision for—for your mother?"

Grey sat down and plunged his hands into the pockets of his dinner-jacket. He felt like a man who had come suddenly out of a world of fierce action into this difficult calm life of social intercourse.

"He did not, Lord Downham," he said. "As far as I can gather, the late Lord Stratton had no sense of his responsibilities."

"Perhaps not," agreed Lord Downham, waving that point aside. "But his family had —er—had a strong sense of—responsibility *for* him. If your—mother had applied to my father—he would undoubtedly have—have taken steps to—to make some proper provision for her."

"Naturally," put in Lady Adelaide spitefully.

"She would never have done that," Grey said.

The three Strattons, each in his or her own manner, looked without any equivocation their settled incredulity. That this was the weak

point in his story was the conviction that their faces confidently expressed.

"I can't see why, quite—why not," Lord Downham said.

"She was not the kind of woman who would owe anything to the family of the man she despised," Grey explained.

Lady Adelaide murmured something about the "independent spirit of the poor," but Lady Downham leaned forward as though she had just discovered some sure ground for hope, and interrupted her aunt by saying:

"Yes, but I don't see why she should have married poor Edward if she disliked him so."

"Oh, she must have loved him when she married him," Grey replied. "She would not have married him for any other reason on earth. It's that thought that has prejudiced me against the man more than any other. I find it difficult to imagine how fine a scoundrel he must have been to have changed my mother's love to loathing in a few weeks."

Lord Downham stiffened. "You are quite in error, er—quite," he said. "Poor Edward was—was weak and lacking in a sense of responsibility—we admit that—but your description of him—is—is—I should have thought you

would have recognised—is as unfitting as Lady Adelaide's—er—perfectly innocent misdescription of—of your mother."

"Only I have some grounds for my inference; Lady Adelaide had none."

"I assure you that you are quite in error as to your—estimate of my half-brother," Lord Downham returned, with an air of finality.

"Well, I'm prejudiced, no doubt," Grey said quietly. "But that should help you to understand, in a way, how difficult it is to take another point of view; but here are you imitating my mistake. I'll grant you that I may have made a mistake with regard to my father's character; he did something to prejudice my mother, and I learnt all I know of him from her. But can't you try to realise, on your side, that you're all just as prejudiced with regard to what I've been telling you about my mother? I'd like you to get a truer picture of her than I've been able to give you so far. I want you to understand just why a woman of her splendid character would owe nothing to the man who had deceived and deserted her."

"Rather a curious analogy, isn't it?" asked Lady Adelaide superciliously.

"I don't see why?" returned Grey sharply.

"No?" commented Lady Adelaide. "Well, it may seem natural enough to *you*. But, of course, you have a story to make good; we haven't."

"I would certainly like to convince you that my mother was a noble-minded woman," Grey said.

"Is that all?" asked Lady Adelaide. "It seems to me that that is only a preliminary."

He could not misread her intention. He knew that he was committed to a frank statement, but he felt curiously disinclined to make it. He wished now that he had not sent for his mother's photograph. It would only be despised, as he himself was being despised. He was no longer a Stratton guest. He was a vulgar opponent, who had stooped to unworthy methods, who had insidiously obtained an entry into the family circle, and then attacked it by the secret and cowardly methods of newspaper publicity. The Strattons had restrained themselves remarkably well, but he could not doubt that this would be the last occasion on which he would see them. They were maintaining their dignity, but before to-morrow morning he would be politely told that his visit must come to an end.

He was not conscious of any sense of injury. He did not resent the fact that these people regarded him merely as a tricky Canadian. The lassitude of mind that had supervened upon his outbust of emotion was urging him to a quiet acceptance of their opinion. What did it matter if they thought his declaration was only, as Lady Adelaide had said, a preliminary to his direct attack upon their title and estates?

He shrugged his shoulders and leaned back in his chair as if he considered the innuendo beneath his notice.

Lord Downham was evidently aware that this matter must be handled discreetly, but his wife displayed no such recognition of diplomatic necessity.

"I suppose you do really believe it all, yourself?" she asked on a note of doubt.

Lord Downham frowned and stammered, and his hesitation gave Grey time to say:

"Believe that my mother was a great woman?"

"Oh, it's hardly that, you see," Lady Downham replied. "I mean that doesn't so much concern us. What is so important is whether they were really married."

"And whether I can prove it?" Grey added.

"Exactly," put in Lady Adelaide.

Lord Downham looked at Shepston, who had held so severely aloof from the discussion since his brief interpolation, and who now, by a scarcely perceptible movement of his hand, indicated that there was no need to check his sister's questions. Plainly the claimant was showing his cards, while the family concealed theirs.

"Oh, yes, I can prove the marriage," Grey said carelessly. It all seemed such a tedious, dreary business to him now. And he was wondering whether Tempe would come back from the terrace, whether he would see her again that night or early next morning before he left, whether he should ever see her again? He could write, he reflected, but he had no confidence in any appeal made to Tempe by those means.

"Yes, I can prove it," he repeated, trying to fix his attention on the matter in hand. "There is the register; my father was married under his proper name and title." He paused for a moment, and saw Shepston suddenly tilt the chair he was still holding. No doubt that

was the point he had wanted more particularly to know. "And besides that," Grey continued, "William Hayles, Lord Stratton's tutor, is still living, and he was a witness to the marriage."

Lady Downham looked greatly distressed. "Oh, dear, how very dreadful!" she said.

Even Lady Adelaide was quenched, and looking half pityingly at her nephew. And then all three of them looked at Shepston as if he alone might still save them by some brilliant stroke of invention.

"The Committee of Privileges—the court that would try such a case," Shepston said, "would demand the most rigorous proof."

A spirit of cruelty transiently moved Grey to make the most of his advantage. At this moment he would avenge his mother for the insult put upon her, living and dead, by the Stratton family. He had them at his mercy.

"I know," he said carelessly; "but I don't suppose a clearer or better supported case was ever tried. It seems almost a coincidence that the evidence should be so strong. It is more than thirty years since the marriage was celebrated, I'll admit, but there are many people still living in Toronto who could give

evidence of identity. Then no one denies that Lord Stratton was living in Canada at that time; there is his recognisable handwriting on the register (he had quite a characteristic signature, by the way—that curiously schoolboyish capital E, for example), and Hayles' testimony would be, I should think, incontrovertible—he is a very prosperous citizen now, and is standing for the Legislature."

Lord Downham winced visibly at the reference to his half-brother's signature. That description was, apparently, an appallingly convincing detail. And Shepston, the one hope of the Strattons, had turned his back on them, and was leaning his forehead against the carved marble jamb of the great flower-filled fireplace.

Garton's tardy entrance with the photograph he had been sent to fetch hardly created a diversion. They looked at the portrait of Grey's mother with unconcealed indifference. The only possible interest they could have felt in the woman's virtue had been taken from them.

Outside the thunder had retreated, and could only be heard faintly rumbling in the distance; but a faint crash of torrential rain was falling on the terrace.

Lord Downham rose abruptly and went to the nearest window; he drew back the curtains and then threw the tall French casements wide open. A sweet, cool air blew into the room, and the sound of the rain deepened into a roar. In the morning not a petal would be left on that scarlet field of geraniums before the house. The Italian garden would be beaten flat and its glory turned into a dismal wreck. The gardeners would soon be at work again, drawing on their reserves from half a dozen hothouses. But the best of the summer was over; perhaps the best days of Stratton were over also.

The little party of those left about the table was sitting in a depressed and gloomy silence when Tempe re-entered the room. She came in quickly, as if her exuberant mood had been stimulated by her adventure in the storm, and she were eager now to picture her wonderful experience; but the sight of these five people, each expressing so unmistakably some aspect of despair, instantly checked her.

"Hallo!" she said; and then, as no one responded, she came hesitatingly forward.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

5

Lady Downham looked up. Her usual expression of faint perplexity had given place to one of resignation that was also, in some way, indicative of relief.

"I don't know, dear," she said. "It almost seems as though we've no right to be here—at Stratton, I mean." And then she added: "Of course, we've *never* liked it."

Tempe needed no interpretation of her mother's cryptic explanation. She flushed hotly and looked keenly at Grey He met her gaze calmly, without any hint of confusion. He could test her now, he thought, could discover whether she would, indeed, consider him in a more favourable light if she regarded him as a possible Marquis of Downham.

She did not answer at once. Her slightly puckered forehead and intent eyes spoke of a mind feverishly weighing motives, contingencies, and effects. And her first words made it clear that one of her perplexities concerned the advisability of confessing her own earlier knowledge of the news that had so unexpectedly shaken her family.

"Have you been talking about the claimant?" she asked. "Is there any further news?"

Lady Adelaide took upon herself the task of explanation. "Let me introduce you, dear," she said, and waved her hand in the direction of Grey. "He came to convert us to Socialism, I believe, and I think he has done it. He has certainly convinced us that we have no right here."

Tempe's eyes grew hard, and she glanced across at her father, standing still at the window, but talking now in undertones to Shepston.

"Does father know?" she asked.

"We all know," Lady Adelaide said. "We have had the evidence put before us very plainly."

"I guessed, you know!" Tempe announced, solving the difficulty that was tying her tongue. "Mr. Grey is so like Eddie Yaxley. I said so at tea yesterday. But——" She broke off and looked keenly again at the cause of all the trouble. There were doubt and inquiry in her glance, as if she were still uncertain whether he were not attempting some tremendous bluff. Apparently she could find no answer to her question in the unembarrassed stare that dared

her to speak her mind, for she turned away and went over to her father by the window. She put her hand on his arm, and he looked down at her affectionately and then drew her a little closer to him—it was the first endearment that Grey had seen exchanged between any members of that family.

He knew that they were all waiting for him to get up and leave them alone. Lady Adelaide had turned her back on him and was whispering to her niece. He had been isolated. Without any rudeness, they had made him aware that, however clear his claim to be a member of their family, he was an alien and an intruder. That attitude did not hurt him. His sense of power had returned. He had them all in the hollow of his hand. They might hate him for what he was and what they believed he had done, but they could not afford to despise him. He could wait. They would know soon what he stood for; meanwhile a little adversity was good for them. And, above all, he wanted to be sure of Tempe.

It was Lord Downham who took the first step towards the establishment of a new understanding.

He signed to Shepston to close the window

and shut out the sound of the deluge, and then came slowly back across the room and held out his hand to Grey.

"May I greet you as a member of the family?" Lord Downham said; and his stuttering mannerisms of speech had almost left him. He looked a little depressed, but he had not the air of a man who had received an incurable hurt.

Grey started to his feet and took the hand that was offered to him. "Then you believe my story, sir?" he asked.

"I have very little doubt of it," Lord Downham replied. "This claim of yours has not been—altogether unforeseen by us. I had hoped——" He paused, and then, changing his mind, continued: "Your claim will have to be—be made good in the proper course. There will be involved and difficult—formalities to be undergone. But I shall not—you may find it, perhaps—er, difficult to believe me—I shall not in some way be so—so sorry to be released from certain responsibilities——" The end of the sentence was lost in an incoherent mumble. He had been speaking naturally, and Grey realised that even his usual stuttering delivery had been but another defence against a world

that had always taken his intellectual abilities at far too high a valuation.

Grey was moved then to make his declaration of independence, and he still restrained himself only because he must first learn Tempe's mind with regard to himself. She was standing aloof now, and he could not read her intention, but he had no doubt that she believed him to be serious in his determination to claim all that was his.

"The responsibilities?" he echoed. "Yes, the responsibilities must be overwhelming."

Lady Downham sighed. "One couldn't retire," she remarked; but her husband evidently took a more earnest view of his duties.

"I should like to think," he said, and his expression had in it some pathetic note of pleading, "to think that the—the tradition might be upheld. The Strattons have stood for—something. It isn't quite easy to explain to you—just what I mean. I feel in speaking to you, who—who may perhaps prove to be the true head of the family—that I am speaking to—to one who has been brought up in such a different tradition that——" No training could have made Lord Downham an efficient speaker,

and the thought of all the toil and application that must have been expended in learning his every public utterance by heart gave Grey a deep sight of the man's sincere sense of duty. Hardly less wonderful was his willingness to conform to the tradition of the succession. Indeed, his readiness not only to accept, but also in some way to defer to the usurper who threatened to rob him was more than royal.

Grey bowed his head. He recognised that it was a fine spirit that animated this representative of an old race. The man might be inefficient, and his attempt to cover his inabilities by certain mannerisms and pomposities might appear absurd, but underneath it all he had a devoted, loyal heart; he was willing to sacrifice all his personal honour for the sake of his principles. And before Grey could reply to that touching appeal for the maintenance of the Stratton tradition he received further evidence of the same spirit, and this time from a source that at last relieved him from further deceptions.

Tempe had come back into the circle, and had again taken her father's arm, leaning her head towards him with a beautiful gesture of protection.

"We mustn't count too much on Stratton now, dear," she said. "But even if we are to be known as the younger branch, you shall have one of your ambitions fulfilled. I can marry Eddie Yaxley still, you know; it won't make any difference to dear old Eddie."

She did not look at Grey, but he knew that he had had his answer. He watched Lord Downham's gentle response to his daughter's consolation with a new pride in the fact that he was related to these kindly people by the ties of blood.

Then he lifted his head and faced them with his old self-assertion.

"And now that you have all passed judgment," he said, "will you be very patient and hear what I have to say?"

"Of course, of course," Lord Downham mumbled; but Tempe's eyes were narrowed suspiciously. It seemed as if her faith in the claimant had been utterly destroyed.

6

"It may be tedious, but I must explain," Grey began; and finding that he could not express the things that were burning within

him while he stood facing what proved to be an attentive, even eager, audience, he talked pacing backwards and forwards, his hands for the most part in his jacket pockets.

"You have only seen one side," he said, "and I know what a handicap that can be, for until the last few days I had only seen one side either. Why, when I came over to England I had a far worse opinion of you than you could ever have had of me, because I was ready to take pains in discovering your faults, and you would never have troubled yourselves to discover mine."

He paused a moment and looked half whimsically at Lady Adelaide.

"Oh, yes; I came prepared to find you the representatives of a rotten, decadent society," he said. "I came to make scorn of you for an American public, to hold you up to ridicule in my next book."

"What a pity you changed your mind!" put in Lady Adelaide.

"Why, no, madam," Grey returned quickly. "If you will hear me out, you'll find that you are as wrong on that score as you were earlier in the evening. But you must try, if you can, to appreciate my point of view, just

as I have learned, to a certain extent, to appreciate yours."

He glanced round at them and found on every face some look of resignation to the inevitable—but Shepston looked as if he were also suffering some pang of remorse. It was quite evident that none of them guessed what he had to say. They one and all believed that he had been tempted by wealth and display, that he had become a spurious convert to their traditions. And he felt the joy of a public speaker who knows that the audience are soft clay for his modelling.

"Why, at this moment," he went on, "you are all condemning me unheard. You have arraigned and tried me and passed judgment without hearing one single word of my defence. I don't want to be didactic—I'm not a schoolmaster come to give you a lesson, but I must—oh, I *do* condemn you still for your prejudices, despite all that is so great in you—and there is so much that I have come to admire—I do condemn your prejudice. You have only seen one side, and there are many sides.

"Haven't you condemned yourselves by crediting such a mean plan to me and such mean motives? Are you all so blind that you

could think I should condescend to a trick like newspaper publicity?"

He stopped again and stretched out his hands towards them. "Can you honestly say that you disliked me before this evening?" he asked.

Lady Adelaide smiled grimly and twisted her satirical old mouth a little to one side. "Why, no, Mr. Grey," she said, mimicking the accent he occasionally reverted to. "Not till we found you'd come to cheat us of Stratton."

He smiled at her frankly. "You're the worst of them all, you know," he said; and she tossed her head slightly, but showed no sign of being offended.

He fell to his pacing again as he continued: "Well, then, why did you condemn me so readily? Just because you are ignorant of any life but your own. You think there are but two kinds of humanity, your kind and the others, and you *must* learn that that isn't true. You are not fit to rule while you believe that.

"I'm only an object lesson for you, but I want to make the thing clear. Now, Mr. Shepston knows and Lady Tempe knows one thing, and that is that I had no hand at all in that

newspaper rubbish. It was done by a journalist who had ferreted out my story on his own account; and after it had begun I did my best to stop it. Of one thing you may be sure, this foolishness in the Sunday paper is the last you'll hear of it from these sources."

"Did—did I understand you to say that Shepston and my daughter knew—that you—that——?" interpolated Lord Downham in great perplexity, and then stopped as if he imagined that his sentence were complete.

"Yes, they suspected me, and I confessed," Grey said.

"But why——?" Lord Downham began.

"Why did they say nothing to you?" Grey took him up. "Well, I can't guess Mr. Shepston's motives, but with regard to Lady Tempe, she did me the honour to trust me."

"To trust you?" Lady Downham said, as if the idea were inconceivably grotesque. "Trust you to do what?"

"To be true to myself," Grey said. "True to my mother's teaching."

The three older members of the Stratton family stared their perplexity, and Lady Adelaide was the first of them to recover her wits.

"Let's hear the whole caboodle, Mr. Grey," she remarked. "I think you said that you weren't responsible for the newspaper scandals."

"I was certainly not," Grey replied. "Nor did I come here with any sort of intention of claiming this estate."

"What made you change your mind?" Lady Adelaide asked.

"I never have changed my mind," Grey said.

"But you've made your claim," returned Tempe, with a flush of defiance.

"I have made no claim, nor do I intend to," replied Grey.

The flat statement set them aback for a moment. They failed to grasp immediately the full significance of the thing he had said; and then Lord Downham rose to his feet with a certain dignity and said:

"We are not used to—to practical jokes, Mr. Grey."

Grey flung out his hand with a despairing gesture. "Oh, haven't I asked you to listen to me?" he said. "I want so much, for your sakes as well as my own, to make this thing clear, but you will jump to your own conclusions. Please sit down, Lord Downham, and try to understand

that I am not the kind of man who plays practical jokes on anyone."

"But it is—is incredible that you should ——"

"Should refuse Stratton and all that it stands for? Yes, perhaps it is; just as incredible as it is to me that you should prefer your way of life to mine. Is it too hard for you all to believe that?"

He paused for an answer, and Lady Downham asked: "Do you mean that you don't want Stratton?"

"I do mean that, Lady Downham," Grey said; "and I mean, furthermore, that nothing would induce me to take it."

Lord Downham was mumbling something about "generosity."

Grey took him up quickly. "No, sir, no," he said; "that is just the point that I am trying so hard and so fruitlessly to make. This attitude of mine has nothing to do with generosity, nor with the real feeling I have come to have for you, who are, after all, my only kin. No, when I refuse to be loaded with the responsibilities of title and wealth, I am making no kind of sacrifice; rather, I am admitting a weakness that I've only just discovered

in myself. Believe me, I could not endure to carry this state and these responsibilities. The joy of my life is the common struggle upwards against life; the thought of the struggle to come down, to take a high place in your English Society, and, as it were, to fight to come down to the level of my tenants, is utterly repulsive to me. I love the people, and I could not endure to separate myself from them. I hate the society of your class, and in spite of all that I have learnt in the past few days I still intend to attack with all my strength the principle that sets them on a sham pedestal."

And then he turned, and, standing quite still, he looked straight at Tempe as he continued: "But there is another thing, too, and that is to be free, to have a firm purpose in life, but to be responsible to no man. You can never be as free as I am. You are not independent. You are tied by all the duties you owe to your Society, and your ambitions are limited by the means of your pleasure. You are shut in, confined within such horribly narrow walls. You can never feel the happiness of new experience, of adventure, because you never know the thrill of danger. To-night, perhaps for the first time, you have come near

to life. Yes, you too, Lady Tempe," he went on. "You came near a reality when you professed yourself willing to marry Mr. Yaxley. You meant it as a willing sacrifice."

"What right have you to come and lecture us all?" she replied sharply.

7

And with her defiance of him the spell of his influence was partly released. They, the Strattons of Stratton, had sat and listened to this almost unknown Canadian with a humility that was strangely foreign to them. Now they began to realise what they had done.

"Very upsetting," Lady Downham said, turning to Lady Adelaide, and that old lady replied acidly:

"It seems that this young man, who never plays practical jokes, has been having considerable sport with us."

Shepston intervened. He had so far been curiously silent during the long scene that had been partly of his making.

"If it were nothing more than sport, we might forgive him without much difficulty," he said.

"Quite so," agreed Lord Downham, automatically taking his cue from the man who had guided his career.

"Well? Clever Reggie!" Lady Adelaide prompted.

"The whole affair is most infernally complicated," Shepston went on. "Grey doesn't want the title or its increments; that is quite certain. He proposes, I understand, to go away and continue life under the name he has assumed?"

Grey nodded his assent.

"But, as I have already pointed out to him," Shepston continued, "that may only postpone the difficulty. If he has children, a son, he cannot possibly guarantee that that son will not some day turn up and insist on his rights."

"It will be very trying for us to know that it's always hanging over us," remarked Lady Downham.

"Oh, impossible, impossible!" her husband agreed. He got to his feet and began to walk slowly up and down the room, his head bent, his eyes on the ground. The others watched him, waiting for him to speak, and after a few moments he paused and looked at Grey.

"Candidly, I should be relieved if—if you'd take what belongs to you," he said.

And it seemed as if this were to be the outcome of all their antagonisms, that by an incredible turn of the wheel these five people were after all about to unite in pressing upon Grey all that he had so recently deemed to be their dearest possession.

He did not answer at once. He looked at Tempe, and she met his eyes with a question.

"If I may say so," Lord Downham continued, "I have—changed my opinion with—with regard to you as a possible owner of Stratton. I cannot but think that—when you have realised all the responsibilities and—and traditions—that you will not unworthily uphold them. I have found much to admire in—in what you have said to us. I can understand——"

"Oh, please stop, Lord Downham," Grey interrupted him. "What you are asking is inconceivable. I should make no sort of master for this place."

"You are determined to—to return to Canada?"

"Absolutely. Stratton is beautiful, and it

appeals to me in many ways, but it limits me. I can't see the world from here; I can't see the problems of humanity. This place is a formula. I don't say now that it doesn't still work in a way, but I want to find a larger and more inclusive theory of life. If I were master here, I should be forced to assume the formulæ that have gone to the making of all that this stands for in English Society. And that confines me. I want—I want to find knowledge that cannot be reached by this formula. Do you understand me?"

Lord Downham nodded gravely. "I understand that you want—more space," he said.

Tempe drew in her breath with an audible gasp. "Oh, father, you too?" she asked. "And I never guessed."

"Perhaps I hardly knew it myself," Lord Downham replied simply. And then he smiled and added: "But you, Tempe, do you mean that you have felt—and known that you wanted —er—more space?"

"Oh, but immensely more!" she said passionately. "To-night, while I was watching the storm on the terrace, I had made up my mind that I must somehow break out of all this. But when I came in and found you all in such

trouble, I thought—I don't know, the very threat of losing Stratton seemed to make us more free."

"And will you be free as Duchess of Liverpool?" Grey asked.

She looked at him with steady eyes that no longer held a question.

"It won't be necessary for me to marry Eddie now that you aren't going to take Stratton," she said.

"You don't wish to marry Yaxley?" her father asked, with a suggestion of disappointment in his voice.

She jumped to her feet and shook her head emphatically.

"Are you so tremendously keen, dear, on that old Yaxley-Stratton alliance?" she asked; and before her father had time to answer she lifted her head, and, with a challenging glance at Grey, continued: "Because, you know, I had a proposal of marriage two nights ago from Eddie's second cousin, and if you insist, I think of the two I would almost sooner——"

She was already making for the door, and was out of the room before her father or mother had grasped the significance of what she had said.

"Eddie's second cousin?" Lady Downham was saying. "Let me see, that would be——"

Grey had moved away from the group about the table and was talking to Shepston.

Lady Adelaide was sound asleep in her chair.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVEN OAK

1

THE storm had cleared the air, but had wrought such havoc in the process that it had created new conditions rather than alleviated old ones.

The wreck of the parterre, the scattered flower-heads and earth-soiled leaves, the channelled beds and pitted, blackened gravel was of little account. In a few hours the glory of the terrace could be restored to its old boasting assertion of brilliance. But down there in the park two of the ancient oaks had been struck, one of them an historic tree, planted by Queen Elizabeth in 1567. For more than three hundred and forty years that mighty veteran had defied all the powers of the air, and now it had been riven by a single stroke that had left it in danger of final destruction.

Grey, waking very early, had gone out into the park before breakfast, and saw that already

the work of renovation had begun. The morning was overcast and threatening. It seemed as if that great storm had marked the end of the summer.

He left the parterre, finding something that annoyed him in this preoccupation with outward appearances, and wandered down the hill until he came to the great oak that had been so ruthlessly stricken. The head forester and an assistant were there before him, diagnosing the hurt.

"Do you think that it will be possible to save it?" Grey asked. The forester stared thoughtfully at the oak. "Oh, well, save it for a time, sir," he said. "We can saw off the big branch and clamp it up, but it'll never be the same tree again. Once they've been opened, the rot gets in, do what you will—particularly an old tree like this."

He went a little nearer and pointed to the cleft where the main branches threatened to fall apart and split the great trunk. "But it was none so sound as it looked outside, you see, sir," he said. "If there hadn't been the beginnings of rot at the fork, it would ha' been good for another three hundred year. You never know with this old timber what's going

on inside. I've seen trees that looked as sound as a bell snapped off in a gale, and the trunk's been little more than bark—heart rotted clean out of 'em."

Grey went a little closer to the oak, and observed the dark tapering stain on the bright surfaces of the fracture.

"Yes, it had begun to rot," he said. "But you'll save the appearance of it for a long time yet, I think."

The forester thought it very probable, and added that "his lordship" set great store by that tree.

2

When he returned to the house Grey found Shepston in the breakfast-room. The little man was as spruce as ever, and his smile when he said "Good morning" as charmingly friendly and uncommunicative, but his eyes looked tired and his face a little drawn, as if he, too, had been permanently changed by the great crisis of last night.

"Been out so soon?" he asked cheerily; and Grey gave him the news of the Elizabeth oak.

"Older growths than that are keeping up appearances with the rot eating into them," Shepston said. It was evident that he, at least, was not tempted to be sentimental about mere timber, whatever its associations.

Grey did not affect to misunderstand him. "I suppose there will have to be some sort of definite arrangement made," he said.

"As a result of last night's hurricane?" Shepston amended. "Yes, Grey, there will indeed. But we can't discuss it here. If you will, I should be glad if you could come to my room when we've had breakfast. As a matter of fact, I have a cut and dried proposition, and I should prefer to discuss it with you alone. Afterwards Downham may have certain criticisms."

He concluded his sentence with a gesture which suggested that Lord Downham's part in the business would be quite formal.

During the meal he discussed the Socialist movement in America, displaying a remarkable knowledge both of the literature and the conditions; and Grey inferred that there was at least one subject which could not be aired before the Stratton servants.

Shepston's room was a surprise. It was on

the first floor, and was, in fact, a particularly well-organised office.

"My workshop!" he said. "Essentially modern, and it's a hobby of mine to have efficient appliances. I use card-indexes and the last thing in letter files—my secretary keeps them all for me, of course. The secretary's secretary," he added thoughtfully, as if he wished to emphasise his own function in that household; "and I have an estate telephone, you see, so that I can talk to stewards and tenants and all kinds of employees. I often come down here alone, when the family is in London, or abroad, or away somewhere, and have a regular bout of estate management. I flatter myself that the thing isn't badly done on the whole."

"You are a perpetual surprise to me," Grey said.

"And yet you know me better than most people," Shepston replied.

"I?" Grey exclaimed.

"You've taken a certain amount of interest and trouble, you see," Shepston said. "The people I know would never do that."

Grey looked at him thoughtfully. "These people must know uncommonly little about

you, then," he said. "For I must confess that you have puzzled me."

Shepston threw himself back into an armchair and passed one of his beautifully kept hands rather wearily across his eyes.

"Sit down, Grey," he said. "There is no hurry, and, now that we are no longer adversaries, we can talk. It's a relief to me, though I thoroughly enjoyed our little diplomatic duel. I beat you at first, but I should have known that you were too strong for me. I made the great mistake of undervaluing my antagonist."

"I didn't do that, anyway," Grey returned; "but I admit that you've still got me guessing. I don't know this minute what your game was—or is."

"Was!" Shepston corrected him. "Definitely 'was.' But surely my interest was clear enough?"

"I could only infer that you meant me to make that claim."

"I did. And I meant you to make it good."

"But why? It seems to me that——"

"Good God, Grey, sometimes you are amazingly simple," Shepston said, with a touch

of impatience. "Couldn't you draw your own deductions from last night and credit me with having known for years all that Downham had tried to keep hidden even from me? Nothing could have been better for him, or my sister, or Dickie, than that they should lose Stratton and the title. And they know it in their hearts, but they just run on by a kind of inertia; and they are unquestionably congratulating themselves this morning that they haven't got to turn out and make any change in their lives. I will admit that I had one bad moment last night, when I thought that I had been mistaken and that Downham was going to take it badly. I was scared and remorseful for about five minutes, but I know now that I was a fool to have been frightened. It would be the best thing in the world for them all if you would persist in your claim."

He paused a moment, and then went on: "Oh, hopeless, I know. I saw that. You're iron, but you'd make a damned fine marquis. I should like to hear you speak in the Lords."

"But you," Grey put in. "Did you want a change for your own sake?"

"Heavens, yes!" Shepston said. "I've wanted it this ten years; but I suffer from

inertia, too. It's in the air of all that appertains to Stratton; it's the dry rot that's affecting all our big families in England. We run on, you see. We don't do our job so badly, but we've no initiative, no force; and unless the big war in Europe comes within a year or two, we shall be undermined from below. Oh, yes, I wanted a change, but I've never had the initiative to break away and begin again—until you came. You affected me that first afternoon in Portman Square—I liked your drive and energy; and when I began to suspect your identity, down here, I was inspired with new energy, too. I thought then that I could break away. Incidentally, you've spoilt my last chance in life by refusing Stratton."

"It isn't too late," Grey said.

Shepston waved him aside. "Ten years too late," he returned. "I'm in the rut again now. Nothing can ever lift me from it; which reminds me that we have to settle one or two points."

"I suppose there must be certain formalities," Grey agreed.

He was trying this candid confession as a solution of the puzzle that had intrigued him, and he found that it fitted. And yet Shep-

ston himself still remained an enigma. He might, with all his amazing capacities, have been a cabinet minister at least, and he had preferred to remain Lord Downham's secretary. Inertia? Did that explain everything? Had that old oak been affected by the same prevalent stagnation? Had its cells lost their power of resistance to the invading rot?

"It won't be difficult to arrange some form of abdication for you," Shepston was saying. "Downham will, in effect, be your trustee, although he will not be accountable to you in any way. Strictly speaking, he will have no right to use the title, but that can be arranged privately. We can get the title conferred on him for his lifetime, if necessary. The real point of difficulty is that you cannot sign away the succession, and as we must not risk future complications, it will be essential for you to put in all your proofs before you abdicate. Hayles, for instance, will have to swear an affidavit."

"I don't see any difficulty so far," Grey agreed.

"That is coming," Shepston replied. "There is, you understand, Dickie; and, oh! all sorts of contingencies to be provided against. The chances are, for example, that Downham

will die before you, in which case provision must be made for various eventualities, for your having, or not having, a son, and for Dickie being, or not being, alive. Because, you understand, there is a collateral branch that might inherit through Downham's uncle."

Grey sighed wearily. "I'm beginning to realise the difficulties," he said.

"And you are inclined to shirk them?"

"Candidly, I am. It doesn't seem worth while."

"Oh!" exclaimed Shepston, and pointed at Grey with a triumphant finger. "So you are not quite free from the Stratton inertia, eh? It only takes another form."

"These endlessly tedious and foolish formalities about succession to something that one of the parties won't have and the other doesn't want——" Grey began.

Shepston shook his head. "That's where we have you," he said. "Given our theory of life and society, we are capable of inexhaustible energy in construction upon that base. It is when we are faced with the necessity to create a new theory that we fail. We may know that our own theory is weak and that it is fostering dry rot, but we cannot alter it; the thought of

drastic change is paralysing, absolutely paralysing. Now, you——"

"Yes; I can't endure the restriction of your theory," Grey agreed. "I want to find a new formula; and I am paralysed by the contemplation of all these immense calculations that must, I know, be made. Yes, that is my symptom of inertia. I have it, too. I would sooner drive a new road than attempt to mend an old one."

Shepston nodded.

"Well, we will each stick to our own job," he said. "I will work out this intricate document—can you understand that I shall enjoy doing it?—and you shall go off to Canada and drive your new track, while I tediously patch this age-worn road of ours." He paused for a moment, and then continued: "But there's one other point I must consult you about—a delicate one——"

"And one which I can't answer yet," Grey said quickly.

"No?" Shepston commented. "Well, I could, but I won't, and as you have already told me all I want, I needn't press you." Then he smiled and added: "There, too, I blundered—oh! grossly. I felt so sure that Tempe suffered from our form of inertia rather than

yours; and she suffers from neither. She is supremely individual. And, by Jove! I wouldn't like to say now whether she'll go to Canada or take the veil. On my honour, I believe that it's an even chance either way."

3

Shepston's suggestion that Tempe hovered between two alternatives was borne out by her avoidance of Grey all that afternoon.

After a long confabulation with Lord Downham, Shepston, and, finally, Dickie, who had had the situation explained to him and seemed decidedly relieved to hear that he might never succeed to his father's position, Grey figuratively threw back his shoulders and lifted his head, as he had when he came out of the Strattons' house in Portman Square. He felt now that he was released; released from the secrecy that had vexed him when he had been living under false pretences, from any further responsibility concerning the arrangements that would be admirably made for him, and, finally, from the necessity to find some attitude in his relation to the Downhams. He no longer criticised them. For him they had ceased to

be representatives of a class, and had become human beings.

But any pleasure he might have felt in the new freedom brought by his declaration of the night before was more than counterbalanced by his uncertainty as to Tempe's probable answer to the question she gave him no chance to put to her.

She was unusually quiet at the luncheon table, and afterwards she disappeared, possibly to her own room; and Grey spent the afternoon playing golf with Dickie, and wondering whether Tempe would still avoid him after tea. But she did not put in an appearance in the drawing-room at five o'clock, and he mooned away the hours until it was time to dress for dinner, finding ample excuse for the young Strattons' condemnation of their ancestral home as "a place where there was nothing to do."

In his mind he had devised a test that might alleviate the tedium of dinner. He had decided that if she wore black that evening the chances were in his favour, and against him if she were in colours; while if she wore again that flame-coloured dress, with all its associations of reckless gaiety, he determined to refuse an oppor-

tunity of speaking to her alone, even if it were offered.

And when she came down she upset all his calculations by wearing an extraordinarily simple, almost childish, frock of white. Even her mother was moved to mild wonder.

"My dear Tempe, what have you got on?" she asked. "You look as if you ought to have your hair down."

"I feel so young to-night, mother," Tempe said, "quite at the beginning of life, so I raked this up out of an old wardrobe. I haven't grown much since I was seventeen, have I? Morgan hardly had to alter it."

Grey could gather nothing from her expression, and that girlish frock might have been the symbol of devotion to religion quite as reasonably as the mark of her intention to risk life on an income of about three thousand dollars a year.

He was so absent-minded at dinner that Shepston rallied him across the table. "Your spirit must be in the large spaces of Canada, I think, Grey," he said. "There's a vague look in your eyes as if you were walking in an immense silence."

Grey pulled himself together. "I'm afraid

I was wool-gathering," he said. "Yes, and I believe I was thinking of Canada."

"Isn't it very cold over there?" Tempe asked innocently.

"Well, it's a big place, you know," Grey said. "Some of it is within the Arctic Circle, and some of it farther south than London; but we certainly get harder winters in Ottawa than you've ever seen in England."

"I always picture Canada as being under snow," Tempe said.

"Despite the fact that the bread you're eating is quite possibly made from Canadian wheat?"

"Oh, you're quite wrong this time," she returned in the tone of a child who has played a successful trick on one of its elders. "All our flour here comes from good Devonshire corn—Stratton grown. And, really, I didn't know that such a lot of wheat was grown in Canada. Why should I?"

"Oh, no reason why you should," Grey said. He preferred any mood of hers to this whimsical childishness that made her so unapproachable.

No reference to the great change in the Stratton succession was made during dinner,

nor at any time while servants were in the room; but on one or two occasions Shepston had to interrupt some speech of his sister's. It was quite evident that she, at least, had come to disregard any human faculty in the economy of Garton or the footmen.

But afterwards in the drawing-room the same taboo was still observed. They had come to the verge of embarrassment when Lady Adelaide said:

"I don't see why we shouldn't play bridge."

Even Lord Downham accepted the suggestion with evident relief.

Dickie had sidled out of the room with a hint of self-consciousness, and Tempe and Grey, standing behind the card-players, faced one another across the table.

She met his eyes with a slight frown, then she shrugged her shoulders and said:

"Do you want to go out on the terrace?"

He nodded without speaking.

The four bridge-players did not look up from their game.

4

They went out by one of the drawing-room windows and walked in silence up, past the portico, to the half-darkness of the far end of the terrace, where the solitary light of the empty dining-room threw one feeble spoke of illumination out into the night.

Grey would have preferred to walk up and down, but Tempe lifted herself on to the balustrade and sat herself just in the focus of that one ray of light.

"We have to get this over," she said. "No, please, don't interrupt. You must listen to me. I'm not going to pretend that I don't know that you've been looking out for me all day, or that those dear blind people in the drawing-room have done their little best to push us into each other's company; and I know that they are quite ready now, even Reggie, to say how glad they would be if I clinched their arrangements by marrying the real heir, and at the same time killed the other bird my father has been potting at, by 'strengthening the old alliance between the Strattons and the Yaxleys.'" She gave her last sentence all the air of a quotation.

"But last night——" Grey interrupted her.

"Oh, last night was twenty-four hours ago!" she returned. "And last night was different from to-night in a hundred ways. I was sentimental. I was sorry for the pater, and I had a moment's admiration for you when you stood up and bullied us all. And I hadn't recovered from the effects of the storm. But now I am quite normal again, and I want you to understand clearly—oh, beyond the shadow of a doubt!—firstly, that I'm not going to marry you to please the sentimental ambition of my family, and, secondly"—she stopped as if she wished to make the point very plain—and then said: "Oh, secondly, I'm not going to marry you for the good of my soul. You needn't begin to argue about it. I know now everything you have to say. You were quite explicit last night, and I've been thinking it all over this afternoon. And I have definitely decided that I won't be a counter in their game or yours. What I shall do I don't know yet; but I will be independent, whether I marry Eddie—who would never try to coerce me in any way, poor dear—or whether I take a line of my own.

"I think that's all," she concluded. "I suppose you have nothing to say? If you attempt one of your old arguments, I shall get down and go in."

He was standing very near her, his head on a level with her shoulder, and he could see her face faintly lit against the blackness of the night. That pale outline stood out for him as the one vision of reality among all the uncertainties of the world. It seemed to him that that beautiful face, shining softly out of the darkness, had come to him from the obscurities and perplexities as an enduring symbol of something stronger than life or death. And yet, as he worshipped, he knew that he must realise all the manhood within him; that if he would retain his vision he must be willing to dare all, to risk his principles, his ideals, his very life if necessary, if he would penetrate the ultimate and supreme mystery of love.

He did not hesitate. Very gently he put his arms about her, and then, because he must still worship even while he ruled, he bent his head so that his forehead touched her shoulder.

She made one movement as if she would release herself, but those gently enclosing arms of his were immensely too strong for her.

"No, I've listened to all you had to say," he said in a low, even voice; "now you must listen to me. I have no arguments, only this" —he pressed his forehead against her shoulder, and went on so softly that his words seemed to come from some far depths of space—"only that I love you so well that I am ready to give anything you ask. I am ready to make the last sacrifice, but I will not release you. This isn't any new, sudden love of the last few days. It is older than life. It has always been. I am yours and you are mine, and we came to each other now, in this recent life of ours, to take up our love again, clean and bright from some old experience. We are equals, Tempe, and I worship you while I command you; but I will not let you go."

He raised his head and looked at her; he saw that her dark eyes glowed with understanding, and then she stooped towards him until her cheek touched his hair.

"What sacrifices would you make for me?" she asked.

"Any that you care to ask," he said.

"You would take the title and Stratton if I wished it?"

"Yes," he said quietly. "My love does

not demand sacrifice from you. I claim nothing but yourself, and I claim you because you are mine, because you have always been mine."

For a long moment they did not speak. He still held her, and her cheek leaned more heavily now upon his hair. Then she said very gently: "You are a terrible boaster, aren't you? I don't mean that you wouldn't do all you promise, but you want me to believe that your love is so much bigger than mine. If your love doesn't demand sacrifices, why should mine? Do you really think me such a feeble thing?"

"Oh, how can there be any question of sacrifices between you and me?" he said.

"But you shan't have all the joy of giving," she returned.

"Does it matter?" he asked.

She released her arms and put her hands on his shoulders, bent down to him, and kissed him on the mouth—a firm, brief kiss that left his lips sealed with the ecstasy of her touch.

"You dear," she said. "Of course it doesn't matter."

5

PRESENTLY they crept softly back along the terrace and looked into the brilliantly lighted drawing-room.

The four bridge-players still sat at their game. Lord Downham, the dummy in that hand, leaned back in his chair, his gaze abstracted from the table, his face set in his habitual expression of reserved wisdom.

Lady Adelaide, his partner, leaned avidly over the cards, ruthlessly intent on getting the last trick out of her game.

Lady Downham frowned with a look of ingenuous perplexity; if only they would give her release from these terrible problems, her face said, she could be placidly content.

Shepston had his back to the two onlookers. He must remain to them something of an enigma always. But even in the set of his shoulders there was a suggestion of quiet confidence in his own ability to win the game he had chosen to play.

Tempe gave a little sigh.

"I can't face them to-night," she said. "But you must go in." She gently touched

his sleeve with her cheek and slipped quietly away into the darkness.

Grey stood for a moment watching the four figures so sharply outlined in the high light of the great Stratton drawing-room, and then he lifted his head with something of his old contempt and went in to give them his message.

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